MAPÆ

The World of Illusion

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

MAPE

The World of Illusion

From Mrs Camille Tenney

Author's Name

1917

For Lillian from
Camille. Xmas.

By ANDRÉ MAUROIS

ARIEL: THE LIFE OF SHELLEY
CAPTAINS AND KINGS
MAPE: THE WORLD OF ILLUSION

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The World of Illusion

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

Translated by Eric Sutton

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Mape

MAPE

THE first Nurse reigned by right divine. Françoise, who had seen this friendly and determined countenance by her cradle since she was born, thought it as old as the earth.

Contented with the world in which she lived, she felt no need to imagine another where fantastic beings would carry out her wishes, and Happiness, as it always does, kept Fancy at a distance.

"Some little girls," said she, coming back from a Guignol show, "are frightened of the Crocodile, but I can see quite well that it is a piece of wood with green stuff sewn over it."

"And did you see the Devil, Françoise?"

"Yes, he was just a sort of savage."

Sometimes an unforeseen catastrophe brings about the fall of a system which might have seemed eternal. Nurse was not deposed; she abdicated to enter the service of Love. With her departure there passed away, for Françoise, a tradition, a ritual, which had

been the only support of that delicate little soul. For the space of a year unstable and worthless governments were to follow upon one another. Bad-tempered Léonie, mischievous Angèle, weak minded Miss Patrick—crowned adventuresses issuing their transitory edicts.

How could a Léonie, who had no regard for anything, possess any authority? She knew nothing of the sacred hours of awakening, baths and meals. When she was reminded of them she lost her temper. "Your nurse was a fool," she said. Françoise, at first indignant, then inquisitive, soon found a great deal of amusement in this destruction of her idols. Scepticism made its way into her mind and bred anarchy in her actions.

Born on the eve of the War, she thought of her father, who was a soldier, as a brutal conqueror appearing from time to time. She loved her mother more than anything in the world. But her mother, tired and anxious in those days, could not look after her all the time. Moreover, love without discipline cannot create order in the human heart. The little creature, who was beginning to respect

laws both just and strict, reverted to the beast of prey.

She hits and scratches her vulgar Léonie; she covers her with abuse. "Horrible creature! I hate you! I can't bear to think you are alive! I wish you were dead!" How can she know such hatred, and where has she heard such words? Léonie was horrified and fled: she was succeeded by a gentle Irish woman, lethargic and timid.

"My father used to go out hunting in a red coat," said Miss Patrick, "and I don't like children."

Françoise soon summed up Miss Patrick, and not being, unfortunately, in the least hypocritical, she soon told her what she thought.

In the meantime disorder increased. This little girl, whom everyone had thought to mould according to his will, grew into an unknown terrifying being. Nothing but rages, scenes, all manner of capricious violence. One morning she suddenly refused to go to school and did not go. The next day she demanded to be taken to a circus, and then

announced at the last moment that she had changed her mind.

"Françoise, this is absurd: you have made me take seats for you."

"I won't go."

"She won't go," groaned Miss Patrick, crushed by the inevitable.

"This is ridiculous," said her father, "and I am tired of it. You will go if I have to drag you there howling."

Whereupon Françoise burst into the exasperating screams of pretended anger. It was already too late to go.

Some penalty was called for. She must be made to understand that every engagement must be kept. She shall go without dessert.

"Very well," said her mother with a sigh, "she shall go without dessert."

But when, after the meal was over, Françoise climbed coaxingly on to her mother's knee and whispered, "Mummy, you will give me a sweet, won't you?" Mother is much more upset and feels more as if she had been punished than her daughter. She looks at her husband, who, as a man of method, entreats her with a look to remain firm. All the same she

dares not give way, but to soften Françoise's disappointment she invents this engaging phrase: "There aren't any more of those you like, my poor darling."

Now since our young barbarian found herself involved in these dismal conflicts, she felt, in a confused but urgent way, the need of an imaginary life. Dante constructed a hell to put his friends in. Molière, when times were bad, was inspired by his misfortunes. Françoise created Mape.

Mape is the name of a town, a country, a universe perhaps, which she invented. She takes refuge there now when the outside world becomes unfriendly.

"We are going out this evening."

"I should like to come with you."

"That is impossible."

"Very well then: so much the worse, I shall go and have my dinner in Mape."

In Mape it never rains. Everyone plays all day in vast gardens. Everyone is happy. Fathers do not read from morning till night: they do not answer, "I must work," when asked to play "Pope Joan." Besides, the small children choose their parents out of shops. At

eight o'clock the grown-ups are sent to bed and the little boys take the little girls out to the theatre.

The days on which Françoise has had to go without dessert, the pastrycooks of Mape, standing at the doorways of their shops, dispense cakes to the passers-by. On the evening when Françoise has cried, Mape, with its thousand lights gleaming through her tears, looks even more lovely than on other days.

In Mape the taxis stay on the pavement and leave the road for the children. When you buy a picture book you pay a penny and the bookseller gives you a hundred thousand pennies change.

"But, Françoise, you don't buy books; you can't read."

"I can read the language of Mape."

"Which is the best book in Mape?"

"I thought everyone knew it was Pog and the Flibber."

"Whatever is that?"

"You can't understand; that is Mape language."

"But where is Mape, Françoise; in France?"

"Oh no!"

"Then it is a long way away?"

"Mape? Hardly a yard away."

Mape is in our garden and yet again it isn't. It would seem that the house is situated at the point of intersection of Mape and the earth.

It is the privilege of great artists to create a world as essential as the real one to those who have known it. One after another our friends discover the mysterious kingdom of Françoise, and more than one, when he thinks of happiness, has no longer any hope of finding it except at Mape.

The First Circle of Mape
or
The Creator

The Sorrows of the Young Werther

He is said to have been so given over to Love that, as soon as he met a woman he liked, he tried to win her favours. If he failed, he painted her portrait, and thus extinguished his desire.—LIFE OF FRA FILIPPO LIPPI.

THE SORROWS OF THE YOUNG WERTHER

I

Strasburg

THE Frankfort coach stopped at the "Geist": a German student set down his luggage, astonished the inn-keeper by refusing dinner, and rushed wildly off to the Cathedral. The vergers, as they watched him climb the tower, looked at each other with some misgiving.

The gabled roofs surged in waves against the hard pure lines of the Castle of the Rohans. The plains of Alsace sparkled under the midday sun, dotted with villages, forests and vineyards. At this very hour, in every one of those villages, girls and women would be dreaming. As he looked at this virgin canvas on which his desire had begun to sketch out so many and so various delights, he felt all the vague delightful charm of amorous expectancy. He came again many times. The

platform at the top overhung the adjacent parts of the building so that he could imagine himself surrounded by the open sky. At first he felt giddy. Long illnesses in his childhood had left him morbidly sensitive and afraid of empty space, noise and the dark. But he wanted to cure himself of these weaknesses.

Gradually the vast plain, a chart upon which his heart had written nothing, became enriched with names and recollections. Alsace had become "my beloved Alsace." He could now distinguish Saverne, where he had taken Weyland; Drusenheim, whence a lovely meadow path leads to Sensenheim. There in a rustic parsonage, surrounded by gardens and embowered in jasmine, lived the charming Frédérique Brion. In the far distance, beyond the hills and castle towers, dark clouds were gathering. The student's thoughts turned to the little moving human figures who were hurrying about the narrow streets three hundred feet below. How much he would have liked to enter into these lives, remote as they seemed from one another, and yet united by all manner of mysterious bonds; to lift up the roofs of the houses, to be present unseen

at all those secret and surprising actions through which alone we can understand our fellows. On the previous evening, at the Marionette Theatre, he had seen a performance of the Legend of Doctor Faust.

As he looked up and watched the clouds sail past the spire he felt as though it had suddenly taken flight and was carrying him away. "Supposing the Devil offered me power, possessions, women, in return for the bond of Faust, should I sign?" After a short but honest examination of his conscience he said to himself, "I would not sign it to be master of the world, but for knowledge—yes. Ah, you are too inquisitive, my fine friend."

Rain began to fall and he made his way down the narrow twisting stairway. "One might write a Faust. There are a good many already. . . . But Spies, and poor old Widmann —that is second-rate stuff. Their Faust is a vulgar rascal who is damned by his own baseness: the devil was cheated: he would have got him anyhow. . . . Mine? Mine would be a greater character—a kind of Prometheus. Defeated by the gods if you like, but at least

because he tried to snatch their secret from them."

Below him, in the Cathedral, a dark velvety light poured through the stained windows. A few kneeling women were praying in the gloom. The organs were murmuring vaguely as though under the touch of gentle fingers. Goethe looked long at the vaulting of the roof. When he saw a beautiful tree, he often had the sensation of losing himself in its growth and penetrating its perfect scheme. His thought rose like sap, spread into the branches, and expanded into leaves, flowers and fruits. The immense converging arches of the nave recalled the same manifold and splendid design.

"Here, as in the works of Nature, everything has its purpose, everything is proportioned to the whole. . . . Oh, to write books that should be like cathedrals! If only you could express what you feel! If you could only put on to paper the fire that runs through your veins! . . ."

As soon as he withdrew into himself like this he came upon a whole world of his own. He had just discovered Shakespeare, and he admired him as a man does who takes the meas-

ure of a rival. Why not be the German Shakespeare? He had the power: he knew it. But how could he lay hold on it? What form should he impose upon this living force? He longed to see his emotion, a prisoner at last, rigid like those mighty vaultings. Perhaps the architect himself had once hesitated and despaired in the presence of the dream-cathedrals that had preceded the Cathedral.

There were plenty of subjects. The story of Sir Götz . . . Faust . . . idylls of the German countryside, in the manner of a modern Theocritus. A "Mahomet" perhaps, or a "Prometheus." Any hero would do through whom he could fling a challenge to the world. He would model his heroes from himself, but on gigantic scale, and then breathe his own life into them. A "Cæsar" perhaps? His span of life would not be long enough for so many projects. "A bird-like nature full of vain excitement," his master Herder had said of him. But to fill these wonderful empty frames he needed ideas and feelings: he had to live and live a thousand lives. "Not the being," he said to himself again and again, "but the becoming everything."

"Being nothing? Not even the husband of the charming Frédérique? No, not even that." He pictured to himself Frédérique's grief. Had he really the right to leave her, when his entire behaviour had let her believe that he would marry her, when Pastor Brion had welcomed him as a son? "The right? Are there any rights in love? After all the adventure was as pleasant for her as for me. Had not Frédérique understood all along that the son of Counsellor Goethe of Frankfort would not marry a pretty country girl? Would my father ever have consented? Would she have been happy in a world so different from her own?"

"Sophisms! If you must be false, at least be frank. The son of Counsellor Goethe is of no greater importance than the daughter of the Pastor. My mother was poorer than Frédérique. And as for the world so different from her own, was she not delightful this winter when she danced on the waxed floors of the great drawing-rooms of Strasburg?"

"You are right, but what am I to do? I cannot . . . no, I cannot . . . I should be in bondage if I did. The first duty is to de-

velop all that one has, all that one can become. I shall always be Goethe. When I use my name I mean all it stands for. My qualities and my faults—all are good, all are part of my nature. I was right to love Frédérique because I felt so at the time. If one day I feel I must go away from her to recover myself I shall still be Goethe when I go and all will be as it should."

At this moment he imagined Frédérique in tears by the roadside and himself riding away, his head bent, not daring to look back. "What a scene for a Faust," he thought.

II

A PARCHMENT with a red seal turned the student into a lawyer. The deserted Frédérique wept, Doctor Goethe's horse trotted towards Frankfort. Skating and philosophy proved effectual remedies against some tolerably sharp attacks of remorse. In the spring a course at the Imperial Chamber at Wetzlar seemed to Counsellor Goethe an indispensable adjunct to his son's legal studies.

For a century the Holy Empire had been sinking into the sands of oblivion, and only three mutilated arches of the vast edifice which had for so long sheltered the land of Germany could still be observed: the Aulic Council at Vienna, the Diet at Ratisbon, and the Imperial Chamber at Wetzlar. This latter, the supreme tribunal for all the kings, dukes, archdukes, palatines, bishops and margraves who had divided the authority of the Emperor between them, should have been maintained by

contributions from the various States, but, as often happens in the case of collective institutions, each of the participants, in order to make sure that he should not be the only one to pay, had fallen into the habit of paying nothing. The customary financial expedients were under discussion: some proposed a special stamp, others a lottery or a tax upon the Jews. In the meantime, as some means of subsistence had to be found, the judges obtained their salaries from the litigants.

The principal sovereigns of Germany maintained legations in attendance on this grandiose and sordid shadow of a great judicial institution, and thus created an agreeable and leisured little circle in this provincial town. When Goethe arived at the "Kronprinz" inn he found a noisy table of young attachés and secretaries. He was at once invited to join it, and from the moment of his first conversation realized that he was in familiar spiritual surroundings.

Europe was going through one of its crises of intellectual unrest. For nine years its kings had lived in peace: within their States worn-out constitutions had managed to preserve

enough vigour to make revolutions seem impossible. The contrast between the ardour of youth and the stagnation of society gave birth to a feeling of impatience and disgust, a melancholy peculiar to periods of transition and peace, which was then called, as it always will be, the malady of the age. The young attachés at Wetzlar were afflicted like all their contemporaries. They were great readers: they sought for emotional inspiration in Rousseau and Herder; and when in doubt, and while they were waiting to find it, they drank a great deal of wine.

They were delighted with Doctor Goethe, who was one of their own kind and yet their superior. He, like them, repeated at the turn of each phrase: "Nature . . . respect Nature . . . live in Nature." For Nature was the key-word of that time, as Reason had been for the preceding generation, and as Liberty, then Sincerity, then Violence and then Justice were later to become. But for Goethe Nature was much more than a word. He lived in her, became part of her and accepted her with a kind of gay abandonment. While his new friends, diplomats and literary amateurs, shut

themselves up in their offices in order at least to make a pretence of work, Goethe, boldly displaying his contempt of the Imperial Court and his own determination to learn public law out of Homer and Pindar only, set out every morning with a book under his arm into the lovely country that surrounded Wetzlar. The spring was exquisite. The trees in the fields and meadows looked like great white and pink bouquets. Lying among the tall grasses, near the bank of a stream, Goethe lost himself in the contemplation of all the myriad little plants and insects, and the blue sky. After the tortures of Strasburg, the doubts and the remorse of Frankfort, came a strange serenity, and an amazing activity of mind.

He opened his Homer, and the modern, human aspect of the story delighted him. Those young girls at the fountain were Nausicaa and her companions. The green peas and roast meat which a woman was preparing in yonder great inn kitchen was the banquet of the suitors and the kitchen of Penelope. Men do not change: heroes are not statues of white marble: their skin is hairy and cracked, their hands swollen and restless. Like the divine

Ulysses we sail upon the open sea, in a little vessel suspended above an abyss, and in the hands of the mighty Gods. A fearful yet a beautiful thought when one is lying on one's back among soft grasses, gazing at the vault of heaven.

In the evening, at the "Kronprinz" inn, the great delight now of the Round Table was to listen to Doctor Goethe relating his discoveries of the day. A verse of Pindar, or a rustic church that he had drawn as well as he could; some lovely lime trees in a village square, children, or a beautiful farm girl. He had the gift of charging his stories with an almost naïve enthusiasm which made the most trifling things interesting. As soon as he came in, the movement of life seemed to grow quicker. Among the young men who listened to him, some had talent, but none had genius. "Ah Goethe," said one of them to him: "how can one help loving you?"

All Wetzlar soon sought his acquaintance. Two of the secretaries, although unmarried, lived on the outskirts of the Round Table. One of them, young Jérusalem, of the Brunswick Legation, was a very handsome youth

with soft melancholy blue eyes. He kept himself at a distance, people said, because of an unhappy passion for the wife of one of his colleagues. He came once or twice to see Goethe, who was interested in his pessimism. But Jérusalem was too reserved to allow of the establishment of a real friendship.

The other hermit was Kestner of the Hanover Legation. When his comrades spoke of him they always called him the "Fiancé." He was, in fact, understood to be engaged to a girl in the town. He was extremely serious-minded, and his chief, who had a great respect for him, left him, in spite of his youth, a great deal of responsibility. It was for this reason that he had not time to come and dine at the "Kronprinz." At the outset, the praises which the choicer spirits bestowed on the new arrival had put Kestner against him. But one day, when he was taking a walk in the country with a friend, they came upon Goethe under the trees. The conversation at once became deep and earnest, and after two or three meetings, Kestner, too, made up his mind, with the solemn deliberation that was characteristic of

him, that he had undoubtedly met a very remarkable man.

Admired by his circle, free from all worldly or academic restraint, enraptured by the beauty of that springtime, Goethe was completely happy. Sometimes a transitory feeling clouded his enthusiasm as a light ripple stirs the calm surface of a lake. . . . Frédérique? No, it was not her recollection that passed across the steady glow of his thought. Once more it was like an uneasy expectation. He looked down upon Wetzlar as in days gone by he had looked down upon Alsace from the Cathedral.

"Shall I one day feel a delightful shiver as I open one of those doors? . . . Shall I be unable to read a stanza without my thoughts flying to a beloved face? . . . When I leave a lady, in the evening by moonlight, shall I already find the night too long and the morning too far off? Yes, all this is coming; I feel it. . . . And yet, Frédérique. . . ."

He noted down a recollection. "When I was a little boy I happened to plant a cherry tree, and I loved to watch it grow. The spring frosts destroyed the buds and I had to wait

another year before I could see ripe cherries on my tree. Then the birds ate them, then the caterpillars, and then a greedy neighbour. . . . And yet if I ever have another garden I shall plant another cherry tree."

Thus Doctor Goethe took his walks beneath the blossoming trees, afire with his new passion: he knew all about it except the name of his beloved.

III

WHEN the fine weather came the young men of the Legations used to organize dances in the country. A village inn was appointed as rendezvous. Some came on horseback, others brought their partners from Wetzlar in carriages. When Goethe was invited for the first time to one of these little fêtes it was agreed that he should go with two of the girls to fetch Fräulein Charlotte Buff, whom everyone called Lotte.

She was the daughter of old Herr Buff, the steward of the Teutonic Order, and she lived in the house of the Order, a pleasant white mansion. Goethe got out of the carriage, crossed quite an imposing courtyard, and, as he saw no one, went into the house.

A young girl was standing in the middle of a group of children to whom she was handing out bread-and-butter. She was a blonde with blue eyes and a slightly turned-up nose: her

features were not regular and a severe critic might perhaps have thought her scarcely pretty. But she busied herself with the children with so much charm and simplicity; she seemed so joyous, so unaffected, the whole scene was so happy a picture of one of those Germanic idylls that haunted Goethe's mind, that he was delighted with it.

A man pursues all his life among the race of women the type which, for some mysterious reason, is the only one that can arouse his feelings. In Goethe's eyes the bread-and-butter and the children formed part of this typical picture. It was a rustic grace, a delicate touch in homely matters that moved him. Frédérique of Strasburg had already figured as a Muse of the countryside. Nausicaa, a king's daughter washing her linen, had perhaps given birth, in his mind, to this race of pure and homely maidens. In any case Charlotte Buff's slices of bread-and-butter seemed to him a perfect theme for a domestic symphony.

The girl's conversation during the journey, her childlike pleasure, the good-humoured determination which she showed in amusing her

friends with little games during a storm, finished her conquest of the Doctor. In the completeness of his delight he realized beyond all question that he had found the woman with whom he had been in love for a fortnight.

Lotte herself was also well aware that she had found favour. It must be admitted that she was pleased. Goethe was handsome and agreeable: for a month past all Lotte's friends had talked of nothing but this marvellous intellect. She was a coquette, and a dangerous one, as only virtuous women often are.

Later in the evening Kestner, who had been, as he always was, kept later than the others by his work (he was a meticulous person—he made a rough copy of every letter and never sent off the despatches to Hanover without having read everything before signing it), rode out to join the little party, and from his attitude and that of the young girl, Goethe understood that Lotte Buff was the famous fiancée. This discovery took him aback, but he controlled himself, and without any sign of discomposure went on dancing, and amusing and entertaining the company. They did not break up till dawn. Goethe escorted

his three companions back through the misty woods and the fields refreshed by the storm. Charlotte and he were the only ones who did not fall asleep.

"Please, please," said she, "do not trouble about me."

"As long as I see those eyes of yours still open," he answered, looking at her, "I cannot shut mine."

From that moment they did not speak another word.

When Goethe moved he lightly brushed the young girl's warm knees, and this imperceptible contact gave him one of the keenest pleasures he had ever known. The beauty of the morning light, the slightly ludicrous slumbers of their companions, the astonishing happiness that they shared made them feel like confederates in some delightful plot.

"I am in love with her," thought Goethe. "I am sure of that. But how is it possible? At this moment at Sesenheim. . . . Ah, well . . . one love fades and another blooms. This is Nature's way. . . . But she is engaged to Kestner, to the good and loyal Kestner. What can I hope for? Need I hope? It

will be enough to see her, watch her living among the children, in her house, talk to her and listen to her laughter. What will come of all this? Who knows, and why try to foresee the end of anything? One should live like a running brook."

When the carriage at last stopped at the Teutonic house, which was still sleeping in the grey morning light, he felt quite dazed with happiness.

IV

ON the following day he came to ask after Nausicaa and made the acquaintance of Alcinous. Old Herr Buff had lost his wife a year before; he had eleven children over whom Lotte reigned with benevolent despotism. Goethe, at his very first visit, as might have been expected, immediately won the hearts of the old gentleman and his children. He told some excellent stories and invented some new games. In everything that he said or did there was something youthful and captivating that was quite irresistible.

When he took his departure all the little company begged him to come back soon. A smile from Lotte confirmed the children's invitation. Goethe reappeared on the following day. He had no business to keep him away: he found no happiness except in Lotte's company, and he was not the man to deny himself a happiness that was within his reach.

He came in the morning and in the evening, and in a few days he was an established visitor to the house.

Charlotte's life was indeed delightful to watch. Goethe found once more in her what he had so much loved in Frédérique: an activity practical in its purpose but poetic too from a certain delicate ease in the performance. She worked from morning till night. She washed the small children, dressed them, played with them, while at the same time superintending the studies of the older ones with a great deal of good sense and modesty. She took Goethe out to pick fruit in the orchard and occupied him in shelling peas or stringing beans. When it grew dark the whole family assembled in the drawing-room and at the request of Charlotte, who did not like leaving a friend without useful employment, Goethe tuned the harpsichord. Lotte was not sentimental. She was sensitive, but she was too much occupied to have the leisure or the wish to make play with her feelings. Her conversations with Goethe were instructive and serious. He talked about his life, his religious beliefs, and sometimes too about Homer and

Shakespeare. She was intelligent enough to appreciate the rare qualities of the companion who was becoming a part of her daily life. She was conscious of emotion and perhaps love in all he said, and she was pleased without being disturbed. She knew that her own heart was untouched and that she remained Kestner's faithful and immaculate fiancée.

On his part the Fiancé was a little melancholy. His devotion to his diplomatic duties kept him away from her nearly all day. When he reached Lotte's house he saw Goethe sitting on the terrace at the girl's feet, holding a skein of wool, or found them in a corner of the garden choosing flowers for a bouquet. They welcomed him warmly and at once carried on with him the conversation that they had begun, so that his arrival never gave rise to an embarrassed silence. Nevertheless Kestner guessed that Goethe was not very pleased to see him. He would himself have sooner been alone with Charlotte, and Goethe, on the strength of his standing invitation, was in no hurrry to take his leave. As they were both men of education and breeding, they did not in any way betray these somewhat painful feelings, but both

of them were on their guard. Kestner was all the more alarmed because he was extremely modest. He greatly admired his rival: he thought him handsome and clever. What was worse, Goethe was unoccupied, and one who is always at hand to unburden the restless and unsatisfied souls of those eternal hermits of the home gains great power over them.

The Fiancé would have been more reassured if he had been able to read the more intimate thoughts of his rival. From the very first day the latter had understood that Lotte would not fall in love with him. A woman of her character does not give up a Kestner for a Goethe. He was sure she liked him, and that was a good deal. Besides, what could he have asked for? To marry her? That would certainly ensure his happiness. But that was a happiness that did not tempt him. No, he was satisfied as he was. To sit at Charlotte's feet, watch her play with her young brothers, wait for a smile when he had done her a service or said something that she liked, receive a little tap, light as a caress, when he had ventured too direct a compliment—in this monotonous

and narrow life he found an infinite contentment.

The spring was warm and they passed the days in the garden. All the incidents of this tranquil pure affection figured in Goethe's journal like little scenes out of an idyll. He began to create. Not indeed his mighty edifice, not the Cathedral, but charming little Greek temples in a lovely countryside. What was to come of all this? He would not think about it. He began to accept his actions more and more as natural phenomena.

The evenings grew ever more delightful. When Kestner arrived the three friends went and sat together on the terrace and talked very late into the night. Sometimes they went for a walk by moonlight in the meadows and orchards. They had achieved that quality of perfect confidence which gives so much charm to conversation. No subject seemed absurd, and they had for one another that affection and mutual regard which alone make possible a true simplicity of intercourse.

For the most part it was Goethe who talked: Kestner and Lotte delighted in the amazing brilliance of his intellect. He described his

Frankfort friends, Mademoiselle de Klettenberg, Dr. Merck, strange creature of evil eye and insinuating talk, who looked for cures in books on mysticism. He told them how he had read the alchemists in his company and populated the universe with sylphs, Undines and salamanders. For a long while he had been devoted to the pietists. They seemed to him more sensitive than others to personal religion, less attached to empty practices. Then he had grown tired of them. "They are people of commonplace intelligence who imagine there is nothing outside religion because they are ignorant of all the rest. They are intolerant: they want to mould other people's noses to the shape of their own."

Goethe himself believed that the truth could not lie in the idea of a God external to man. "It must be so very inconvenient to believe in the perpetual presence of God at one's side: I think I should feel as if I had the Great Elector always at my elbow. I believe in the presence of God within me."

Religion, next to love, is women's favorite topic. Lotte followed their conversation with the liveliest interest.

After having escorted their friend home, Goethe and Kestner would often go on wandering about for a long while in the deserted streets of Wetzlar. The edges of the shadows were sharply cut by the moonlight. About two in the morning, Goethe would sit on the top of a wall and declaim the wildest poetry. Sometimes they heard a noise of footsteps, and after a moment saw young Jérusalem pass by, walking by himself with measured steps and bent head.

"Ah," said Goethe, "the Lover!"

And he burst out laughing.

V

SPRING gave way to summer and affection to desire. Lotte was too kind and Goethe too young. Sometimes as they were walking along the narrow paths of the garden their bodies brushed against each other for one instant, sometimes as they were disentangling a skein of wool or picking a flower their hands met. The recollection of such moments kept Goethe awake for entire nights. He found it very difficult to wait for the morning, when he could see Charlotte once more. He recaptured even to their slightest shades the powerful and exquisite emotions that he had experienced with Frédérique, and this return of the seasons in his heart put him out of humour.

"When love comes back it destroys its own quality, which is the expression of the Eternal, the Infinite." Since this too was to repeat itself, human life was a mortally monotonous performance.

With the heavy August days, which cut short their little common tasks and left him long hours to spend at Charlotte's feet, Goethe became more enterprising. One day he kissed her. Unimpeachable fiancée as she was, she told Kestner.

It was a difficult position for the grave and tender secretary. An unguarded remark, a reflection on the unconscious coquetry of Lotte and all would have been lost. But Kestner, no doubt because he was deeply in love with her, had the secret of a gift which, in a lover, is called delicacy. He contented himself by assuring Charlotte of his confidence in her and, as she asked him to do, left it to her to bring Goethe back to the ways of propriety. In the evening she asked the Doctor to stay after Kestner had gone, and told him that he must not make any mistake about her feelings: that she was and always had been in love with her betrothed and that she would never fall in love with any other man. Kestner watched Goethe come up with him, his head bent and looking rather sad, and he at once felt incomparably happy, kind and sympathetic.

The three friends then became united in an odd and charming conspiracy. Following the example of Goethe, who concealed nothing, Kestner and Charlotte fell into the habit of revealing their feelings with the greatest freedom. Of an evening on the terrace Goethe's love for Lotte was the subject of long and delightful conversations. They talked of it as of a natural phenomenon, at once dangerous and interesting. Goethe's birthday was the same as Kestner's. They exchanged presents. Kestner's to Goethe was a little pocket Homer: Lotte's was the pink ribbon she had worn in her bosom on the day of their first meeting. Kestner had thought of sacrificing himself. He did not tell the others, but he noted down his misgivings in his private diary. Goethe was younger, handsomer and more brilliant than he was. Perhaps he would make Lotte happier. But Lotte herself had reassured him: she had said she liked him best, and that Goethe with all his striking qualities was hardly made for a husband. And then no doubt Kestner's courage would have failed him, for he was deeply smitten.

Goethe, himself, under a gay and natural

exterior, was suffering. Lotte's firm decision and her quite definite choice wounded his self-respect. The continual temptation of their life in common increased his desires. He had attacks of violent passion during which, in the presence of the indulgent and sympathetic Kestner, he seized Charlotte's hands and wept and he kissed them.

But in the worst moments of despair he knew that underneath this layer of genuine sadness there lay dormant a deep serenity in which he could one day find refuge. Just as a man out in a storm who knows that the sun is bright above the clouds and possesses some means of reaching that untroubled space, so Goethe in his torment knew that he would soon escape his sorrow and would perhaps find something like a bitter and gloomy pleasure in describing it.

The evenings became shorter and cooler. The September roses began to fall. Goethe's satanic friend, the brilliant Merck, came to Wetzlar; he met Charlotte and found her charming, but he did not tell Goethe so. With a grimace of indifference he counselled flight

to other loves. The Doctor, somewhat out of humour, thought that the time had come to tear himself away from a vain delight that was nearing its exhaustion. The man still found the same pleasure in living in Charlotte's shadow, in feeling the rustle of her dress against him in the darkness, in winning from her infinitesimal and precious proofs of her affection, snatched from the silent watchfulness of Kestner: the artist was satiated with these monotonous emotions. He had increased his spiritual resources by his stay in the place: he had made a collection of beautiful landscapes saturated in romance: the vein was worked out, the harvest gathered, and he must go.

"Must I really go? My soul is turning like the weather-vane on the top of a steeple. The world is so beautiful, and he is fortunate who can take pleasure in it without thinking overmuch. I am often annoyed because I cannot do this, and preach myself sermons on the art of enjoying the present."

But the world was calling him, the world with its infinite promises. "Not to be anything, but to become everything," that must

be his aim. He had his work to do, his cathedral to build. What would it be like? That was still a mystery, hidden in the mists of the future. Yet it was to this dim prospect that he was going to sacrifice joys that would be secure. He forced himself to settle the day of his departure, and thenceforward, sure in his determination, he could plunge into the pleasing frenzy of his passion.

He had arranged to meet his friends in the garden after dinner, and he was waiting for them under the chestnut trees on the terrace. They would come, full of friendliness and gaiety: they would treat this evening just like any other. But this was the last evening. The Master of Events, Doctor Goethe, had decided it: nothing could alter his decree. Departure was painful, but it was not unpleasant to find oneself so inflexible.

He had inherited from his mother such a lively horror of scenes that he could not endure the idea of formal farewells. He wanted to pass this last evening with his friends in a serene and sad enjoyment. He felt in advance the pathos of this conversation, in which two of the participants, in their ignorance of the

true position, were unconsciously to wound the third, who, because he alone was aware of it, would be the only one to be hurt.

He had indulged himself for some time with the agreeable torment of these reflections when he heard the footsteps of Charlotte and Kestner on the sandy path. He ran to meet them and rapturously kissed Lotte's hand. They walked to a dark leafy arbour at the end of the avenue and sat down. The garden was so lovely under the pale moonlight that they stayed a long while in silence. Then Charlotte said:

"I never walk in the moonlight without thinking of death. . . . I believe we shall be born again. . . . But shall we meet again, Goethe? . . . Shall we recognize each other. . . . What do you think? . . ."

"What are you saying, Charlotte?" he asked, completely overcome. "We shall meet again. In this life or the next we shall meet again."

"Do the friends that we have lost," she went on, "know anything about us? Do they feel all that is in our minds when we think of them? The image of my mother is always before my

eyes when I am sitting quietly in the evening among her children, among our children, when they cluster round as they did round her."

She talked thus for a long time in a voice as soft and tender as the night itself. Goethe wondered if this unwonted melancholy were due to some strange presentiment. For himself, he felt his eyes fill with tears, and the emotion that he had wished to avoid was gaining possession of him. In spite of Kestner's presence, he took Charlotte's hand. It was the last day. What did it matter?

"We must go in," she said gently: "it is time."

She attempted to withdraw her hand, but he held it forcibly.

"Let us agree," said Kestner gaily, "let us agree that the first of us who dies shall give the two survivors some information about the other world."

"We shall meet again," said Goethe: "under whatever form it may be, we shall meet again. Good-bye Charlotte. Good-bye Kestner: we shall see each other again."

"To-morrow, I think," said she, smiling. She got up and went with her fiancé towards

the house. Goethe saw her white dress still gleaming for a few seconds in the shadow of the lime trees, and then everything disappeared.

After Kestner had gone the Doctor wandered alone for a while in the lane from which the front of the house was visible. He saw a window lit up: it was Lotte's room. A little later the window grew dark. Charlotte slept. She knew nothing. The novelist was satisfied.

The next day when Kestner came home he found a letter from Goethe.

"He is gone, Kestner. When you receive this letter, he will have gone. Give Lotte the enclosed note. I had made up my mind, but your conversation yesterday has shattered me. I cannot say anything at the moment. If I had stayed with you an instant longer I could not have held out. Now I am alone and tomorrow I go. Oh, my poor head!

"Lotte, I hope I shall indeed come back, but God knows when. Lotte, what were the feelings of my heart when you were talking, knowing that I was seeing you for the last time? . . . He is gone. What spirit made you

choose such a subject? . . . I am now alone and I can weep. I shall see you again, but 'tomorrow' never comes. Tell my young ruffians: he has gone. . . . I cannot go on."

Kestner took the letter to Lotte early in the afternoon. All the children of the house echoed sadly, "Doctor Goethe has gone."

Lotte was sad, and while she was reading the letter the tears came into her eyes. "It was better for him to go," she said.

Kestner and she could talk of nothing else. Visitors came: they were amazed at Goethe's precipitate departure and found fault with his want of courtesy. Kestner defended him with much warmth.

VI

WHILE his friends, much affected, read and re-read his letters, pitied him and pictured to themselves with feelings of anxious sympathy what his solitude would be like, Goethe was walking quickly down the lovely valley of the Lahn. He was going to Coblenz, where Merck was to meet him at the house of Madame de la Roche.

In the distance a hazy chain of mountains, above him the white summits of the rocks, at his feet, in the depths of a gloomy gorge, a river flowing under a curved roof of willows—all this composed a pleasantly melancholy landscape.

The pride of having broken the enchantment of Wetzlar tempered the melancholy of his still lively recollection. At times when he thought over the adventure he had just lived through, he said to himself, "Could not an elegy be made out of it? . . . or perhaps an

idyll?" Or again he would ask himself if he were not better fitted to draw and paint landscapes like the one he was then passing through. "Come," said he, "I will throw my fine pocket-knife into the river: if I see it fall into the water I will become a painter: if the willows hide it from my sight as it drops, I will give up the idea for ever."

He did not see the knife plunge into the stream, but caught sight of the splash and the oracle seemed ambiguous. He postponed his decision. He walked as far as Ems, then went down the Rhine in a boat and arrived at Madame de la Roche's house. He received the most delightful welcome. Counsellor de la Roche was a man of the world, a great reader of Voltaire, a sceptic and a cynic. His wife was accordingly a woman of feeling. She had published a novel, she was interested in literary men and had turned her house, in spite of her husband and perhaps in protest, into a meeting-place for the Apostles of the Heart.

Goethe was more particularly interested in the dark eyes of Maxmiliane de la Roche, a beautiful girl of sixteen, intelligent and precocious. He took long walks with her in the

country, talked about God and the Devil, Nature and the heart, Rousseau and Goldsmith, and indeed spread himself superbly just as if Lotte had never existed. And the recollection of Lotte even gave a zest to this new friendship. "It is a very pleasant sensation," he noted, "to listen to the first accents of a dawning affection murmuring in one's heart before the echo of the last sigh of an extinct affection is altogether lost in the void. Thus when we turn our eyes from the setting sun we like to see the moon rising on the opposite horizon."

But he had soon to return to Frankfort.

A return to the paternal house, after a reverse, brings a double feeling of relief and of discouragement. The bird has tried to fly away but has had to fold his wings once more. While he keeps to the nest he pines for the free air for which his wings had not proved strong enough. The child escapes from the difficulties of a hard and hostile world: he is absorbed once more in the familiar round, which is naturally less opposed than any other to the habits he has formed. There he discovers

again the monotony of sensations grown too familiar, the affectionate slavery of the family.

His travels have been teaching him a sense of proportion, and he is surprised to find his own people still engaged upon their old foolish disputes. Goethe once more heard at home the very phrases that had so exasperated his childhood. His sister Cornelia complained of her father, his mother complained of Cornelia, and Counsellor Goethe, whose temper was not accommodating, wished to send back to the study of lawyers' files a son whose head was full of half-created characters and who had no notion of the world of reality.

Goethe had a positive dread of melancholy, and realizing that it was mastering him, decided that his only chance of salvation lay in at once undertaking an important literary work. He was still thinking of a "Faust," perhaps of a "Prometheus" and perhaps too of a "Cæsar." But after having sketched out several plans, written a few verses, crossed them out and torn them up he recognized that he was doing no good: between them and his work came the image of Lotte.

His lips retained the savour of the only kiss that he had ever had from her, his hands the touch of her firm soft hand, and his ears the sound of that vivid lively voice of her. Now that he was far away from her he found out that she was everything to him. As soon as he sat down at the table his mind went off into sad and fruitless reveries. He tried, as one always does, to reconstruct the past as he would have liked it to have been. If Lotte had not been engaged. . . . If Kestner had been less estimable and less kind. . . . If he himself had been less conscientious. . . . If he had had the courage to stay. . . . or the courage to disappear altogether and force his mind to destroy the images that tormented him. He had hung above his bed a silhouette of Lotte cut in black paper by a gipsy artist, and he looked at this picture with a sort of frenzied devotion. Every evening before he went to bed he kissed it and said, "Good-night, Lotte." When he wanted a pin he took one of those that fastened the portrait to the wall and said, "Lotte, will you let me take one of your pins?" As evening fell he would often sit down and carry on long conversations in an undertone

with his lost friend. These acts, which were natural and spontaneous on the first occasion, had in a few days become empty and melancholy rites, but he found in their accomplishment a certain relief to his distress of mind. He looked upon the commonplace, even absurd silhouette as a kind of altar.

He wrote to Kestner nearly every day and gave him affectionate messages for Charlotte. When speaking of his love he still kept up the half-jesting, half-tragic tone that he had assumed at Wetzlar, because it was the only one that made it possible for him to express the feelings that troubled him without offending Kestner.

"We have spoken," he wrote, "of what may possibly take place beyond the clouds. I do not know; but what I do know is that the Lord our God must be a very cold-blooded person to leave you Lotte."

Another time: "So Lotte has not dreamed about me? I take this very ill, and I insist on her dreaming about me this very night and telling you nothing about it."

Sometimes he gave way to spitefulness and pride. "I shall not write again until I can tell

Lotte that I am loved, and deeply loved, by another."

After a few attempts he was forced to realize that it would be impossible for him to get to work again on the subjects that had interested him in the past until he had rid his mind of this obsession. The only task of which he felt capable was to write about Lotte, to write a work of which Lotte should be the heroine.

But though he had considerable material—his diary, his recollections, even his feelings, which were still vivid—he was faced with great difficulties. The subject was very thin: a young man arrives in a town, he falls in love with a woman who is not free and draws back before the difficulties of the situation. Would this make a book? And why did the hero go away? His female readers would not like this at all. If he had been truly in love he would have stayed. In the adventure as it really happened Goethe had gone away because the call of his art, the will to create, had been stronger than his love. The more he thought about it the more commonplace and inadequate the subject seemed, the more incapable he felt of

working it out, the more his weariness and disgust with all literary labours increased.

In the middle of November Kestner made known to him a surprising piece of news. Young Jérusalem, the handsome melancholy youth who took so many walks in the moonlight wearing a blue frock-coat and yellow waistcoat, and who had been called in jest "The Lover," had lately shot himself.

"Unhappy Jérusalem!" Goethe wrote in reply. "Your news was shocking and quite unexpected. . . . The people who know not joy because their hearts have been hardened by vanity and the worship of illusions are responsible for this and for all our misfortunes. For them there is no forgiveness, my friends! Poor young fellow! When I came back from a walk and met him in the moonlight. I said, 'He is in love,' and Lotte will remember that I laughed. I spoke with him very little. When I left I brought away with me one of his books, which I shall preserve, with his memory, as long as I live."

Events in another's life always aroused sincere emotion in Goethe when they represented possible and unrealized fragments of his own

existence. He studied Jérusalem's story with an almcst morbid curiosity. He was quite aware that if he himself had been slightly different, if certain elements had been lacking in the composition of his intellect, he might have gone the same way. But he was especially interested in it because his first thought had been, when he heard the news: "Here is my *dénouement.*" Yes, the hero of his unlucky idyll might, indeed he ought to, commit suicide. Death, and death only, supplied the element of tragic grandeur that had been lacking in his adventure.

He asked Kestner to send him a complete account of all that he could learn about the affair, and Kestner did so, not without ability.

VII

THE memories of Wetzlar and the account of Jérusalem's death certainly provided Goethe with the beginning and the end of a notable book. It would be a work of the truest and most vivid passion. The part played by the imagination would be, as was always Goethe's aim, reduced to a minimum. He had confidence in himself and he liked his subject. And yet he could not get to work and was still absorbed in his dreams.

He had always needed, before he could start writing, a brief illumination in which, as in a flash of lightning, he had a sudden view of the work as a whole without having time to distinguish the details. But this time he could get no such view of it. His love affair with Lotte, and the death of his friend, were two episodes taken from two different series of Destiny's successions and did not fit in together.

There was nothing in the characters of the people in the diary that suggested the drama of the *dénouement.* Kestner's kindness and freedom from jealousy. Lotte's wholesome simplicity and lightness of heart, Goethe's unassailable happiness and curiosity—such qualities made the hero's suicide improbable. He tried in vain to picture to himself what the scene between Madame Herd and Jérusalem could have been like, and Jérusalem's final reflections. He must remodel the characters and weave another chain of events. But events are strangely linked together. As soon as one is touched the whole edifice is shaken. It seems that the truth must be one, and that if it is touched up a little, even with the most delicate and careful strokes, the mind is torn between an infinity of possibilities.

Once more Goethe was unable to find peace. A fantastic population of plans and projects ranged over his weary brain. Sometimes he thought he could distinguish shadowy and lovely forms, but they vanished forthwith. Like a pregnant woman who cannot find relief, he sought in vain for a position in which

he could be at rest. The hour of his delivery seemed far off.

He travelled to Wetzlar to get details of the drama. He saw the house in which the young man had killed himself, the pistols, armchair and bed. He spent a few hours with Charlotte. The happiness of the engaged pair seemed complete. The very recollection of their evenings of old seemed to have passed out of their calm and well-ordered life. Goethe felt very unhappy and very lonely. His love revived. As he sat upon the sofa in the Teutonic House, looking at the cool and peaceful Lotte, who continued to manage the household with her graceful competence, he said to himself, "Jérusalem was right. Even I myself could perhaps . . ." But Goethe remained Goethe and he returned quietly to Frankfort.

The house seemed more melancholy than ever. The time of Kestner's marriage drew near. In the evening, alone in his room, "in his barren bed," Goethe pictured Charlotte in the nuptial chamber, in a blue striped dressing-jacket, her hair arranged for the night, chaste and charming. Desire and jealousy kept him painfully awake. In order to live,

a man needs to look forward to some shining point, the goal of his journey. But what was there left him to hope for? He saw himself condemned to live, as a humble lawyer or official, in this town whose commonplace middle-class would always dislike him for his intellectual gifts. His mind, which he knew to be capable of creation, would be worn out in drawing up reports or stupid statements for the courts. He thought, without modesty, but not without reason, "I shall live here like a giant chained by dwarfs."

He saw himself buried alive. All the companions of his youth left him one after another. His sister Cornelia was going to be married. His friend Merck was soon leaving for Berlin. Charlotte and her husband would in their turn go away from Wetzlar. "And I am alone. If I do not marry or hang myself you may say that I like life very much"; thus he wrote to Kestner, and a little later: "I am wandering in waterless deserts."

He came to think that the cause of suicides must often be the need felt by a man leading a monotonous and melancholy life to astonish himself and, one might almost say, to divert

his mind by an unusual action. "The love of life," he thought, "depends on the interest we take in the regular alternation of day and of night, of the seasons, and in the pleasure that these alternations offer us. When this interest comes to an end, life is simply a tedious burden. An Englishman hanged himself so as not to be forced to dress and undress every day. I heard a gardener exclaim wearily: 'must I always be looking at those gloomy clouds passing from west to east?' These are symptoms of a disgust with life which, in thoughtful people, is commoner than is believed. As for myself, if I think about the matter coldly, what has life still to give me? Another Frédérique whom I shall desert? Another Lotte who will forget me? The foolish career of a lawyer at Frankfort? Truly it would be a natural and courageous act to renounce such splendid prospects of one's own free will.

"And yet when we think of the various ways of suicide, we recognize that to diminish the number of the living is so contrary to human nature that in order to achieve the result man has recourse to mechanical aids. Though Ajax

transfixes himself with his sword, it is the weight of his body that renders him this last service: when we turn a pistol on ourselves, it is the backward movement of the trigger that really kills us. The only authentic suicide is that of the Emperor Otho, who himself drove a dagger into his heart."

For several evenings when he went to bed he laid a dagger beside him. Before he put out the light he tried to drive the point into his chest. But he did not succeed in inflicting even the slightest of wounds. The body betrayed the spirit. "Ah, well," he thought, "at the bottom of my heart I must want to live."

When he looked into his heart sincerely, trying to rid himself of commonplaces, those insubstantial phantoms that hover above genuine thought, and sought for the reasons which, in spite of everything, made him wish to live, he discovered first of all his pleasure, which for him was perennial, in the marvellous spectacle of the world, that god-sent curiosity of his; then the sad sweet certainty of the approaching birth of a fresh affection; and lastly the more obscure but irresistible instinct to watch

over the work that was, he felt, forming within him an implacable deliberation.

"Don't worry," he wrote to his friends at Wetzlar. "I am almost as happy as two people who are in love, like you. I have in me as much hope as lovers have."

When the time of Charlotte's marriage drew near he asked the favour of being allowed to buy the wedding-ring. He found something of a strange pleasure in irritating this sore. Determined to portray his own sad state he insisted that it should be hopeless. Goethe was his own model and he posed to perfection.

On the morning of the marriage, Kestner, the perfect friend, wrote him an affectionate letter. As Goethe had requested, the bride's nosegay was sent to him: he put it in his hat for his Sunday walk. He decided to take down the silhouette of Lotte on Good Friday, make a grave in the garden and solemnly bury it. When the day came the ceremony seemed to him a little ridiculous and he gave up the idea. The black-and-white silhouette now watched over untroubled slumbers. The Kestners had left for Hanover. Knowing nothing of their

life in this new world, Goethe could not imagine it. In his case pain as well as love needed images to make it last. Had he not already let go the favourable moment for recording such fragile feelings as these?

VIII

HE was still in correspondence with the charming Maximiliane de la Roche, whose black eyes had so helped him to console himself after Wetzlar. One day he learnt that she was going to marry a wholesale grocer of Frankfort, Peter Anton Brentano, a widower with four children, and fifteen years older than herself. "Admirable!" wrote Goethe to Kestner, "dear Max de la Roche is going to marry a prominent shopkeeper!" Doubtless the sceptical Herr de la Roche had considered a large fortune and a numerous family preferable to a youthful heart.

Goethe expressed great pity for poor Max, who, for a gloomy house in Frankfort, was going to abandon one of the most delightful places in the world and exchange her mother's cultivated and charming circle for the society of opulent tradesmen. Still he was overjoyed

to think that so charming a creature was to be within reach.

As soon as he heard of her arrival at Frankfort, he rushed to the house, used all his powers of conquest to captivate the widower's four children, and naturally succeeded in a quarter of an hour in making himself indispensable for ever. When Goethe wished to be agreeable no one could resist him. Brentano was flattered by the presence in his house of the Burgomaster's grandson who was said to be a bright youth, so he gave Goethe a warm welcome.

Goethe immediately recovered his ardour and flung himself into a passionate friendship with his customary impetuosity. Soon his sole purpose in life was to keep Max company, to console her for the smell of cheese and for her husband's manners, to distract her mind by taking her for walks and reading to her. Once more all work was given up. And why should he write? Is there anything that is worth the smile, the sweet expression of contentment and gratitude, that for one fleeting instant flashes on a lovely face?

Max was not a little unhappy among the

jars of oil and the barrels of herrings. She did not like Frankfort. She tried to love her husband, but it was a difficult undertaking. Goethe became her confidant. Less practical than Charlotte Buff, she did not employ him to peel vegetables nor to pick fruit, but she spent the days with him playing duets for violoncello and piano and reading the latest French novels.

They often went out skating together. Goethe borrowed his mother's red velvet mantle and threw it round his shoulders like a cape. He skated perfectly, and as he glided along with sovereign ease, the wind behind him swelling out his royal train, he looked like a young god. Such at least was the opinion of his mother, the Counsellor's wife, and of pretty Madame Brentano, for whose benefit the performance was given.

"Everything is going very well for me," he wrote: "the three last weeks have been nothing but pleasure, and we are now just as contented and happy as it is possible to be. I say we, for since January 15th there is not a single occupation in which I have been alone, and fate, that I have so often cursed, I am now

well ready to flatter and call kindly and wise, for since my sister went away this is the only gift that could be called a compensation.

"Max is still the same angel whose simple and delightful qualities appeal to every heart, and my feelings for her are the joy of my existence."

But, alas! perfect pleasure cannot last and Brentano was soon to upset this unduly agreeable situation. At the outset he had found this young fellow who took his wife for walks extremely convenient: his own time was entirely taken up by the wares of his business and no one could take his place. On several occasions he had chosen Goethe to arbitrate between his wife and himself. It seemed to him that on certain questions the good sense of all the males of the species must be in agreement. Unfortunately Goethe was an artist and, in so far, a traitor to his sex. A husband always becomes, as the comic poets have remarked, most agreeably attached to any right-thinking man, one who, in other words, is of his own way of thinking, but a lover who undermines marital authority must be deservedly odious.

Brentano, noticing that his wife was not settling down at Frankfort, that she criticized the mode of life of an ancient and respectable family, always talked about music, literature and other unhealthy subjects, concluded, not without reason, that some evil counsellor must be making suggestions contrary to conjugal good order, and that the enemy was Goethe.

As soon as he had come to this conclusion he treated Goethe with such insulting coldness that the latter's position in the house became extremely difficult. If he retaliated furiously, as he would have liked to do, he would sentence himself to exile: to endure the affronts in silence was to invite their multiplication. Soon Max herself, who was tired by disputes that spoilt all her pleasure, begged him to be careful and come less often. "I ask you for my own peace and quiet," she said to him. "Things cannot go on like this, they positively cannot."

He fell to walking up and down the room with long strides, repeating between his teeth, "It cannot go on like this." Max, who noticed his violent condition, tried to calm him. "I beg you," she said to him. "I beg you to control yourself. Your intellect, your knowledge,

your talents promise you every happiness; be a man. Why must it be I? I who belong to someone else, I and no other?"

He went home, having promised that he would not come back again, but he was in a state of despair, distraught and talking to himself. So he was always to come upon the pitiful laws of society on the path of happiness. He could only find peace of mind, joy and self-forgetfulness in the constant and affectionate society of a woman, and to obtain the right to this happiness he had either to surrender his liberty or condemn the woman he loved to become "guilty." Never had the conflict between the desires of the individual and the rules of society appeared to him so intolerable. Charlotte . . .? Charlotte was after all in love with Kestner. But Max could not love her oil merchant and did not even pretend to love him. And he had to give way. "Your talents, your knowledge will bring you happiness." How ludicrous! Knowledge is grey and the tree of life is green. Besides, knowledge also is limited by human imperfection. What do the greatest scientists really know? Nothing about the true nature of

things. What is man? His strength fails him just when he needs it most. In his joy, as in his sorrow, is he not limited, always confronted by the melancholy feeling of his own littleness just when he is hoping to lose himself in the infinite?

Quite suddenly, without knowing how the transformation had been worked, he felt once more at peace, master of himself, soaring far above these melancholy thoughts, as if they had belonged to another. "Why, of course," he thought: "that is how Jérusalem must have argued with himself; and no doubt it happened after a scene like the one I have just had with Max."

Thereupon he suddenly saw, with amazing lucidity, how his last unhappy adventure could be worked into the account of Jérusalem's death. Max and her husband, Charlotte and Kestner, Goethe and Jérusalem, seemed to melt, dissolve, and disappear, while their constituent elements, moving with incredible rapidity over the vast plains of the mind, combined harmoniously and in due proportions. The artist was awake at last, and Goethe was completely happy.

Then three new characters were born: Werther, Charlotte, and Albert. Werther was Goethe if he had not been an artist. Albert was a slightly meaner Kestner, endowed with Brentano's jealousy and with Goethe's own intellectual powers. Charlotte was Lotte, but brought up by Madame de la Roche, and a reader of Rousseau and Klopstock.

On the following day he shut himself up to work, and in four weeks the book was written.

IX

WHEN Goethe had finished *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* he felt as free and happy as after a general confession. Dreams, doubts, remorse, desires—all had found their eternal and inevitable place. The Cathedral was built. The last of his workmen-thoughts had already left the yard, and in the silence that had fallen on the place the Architect waited for the earliest worshippers. His past life was no longer in him, but before his eyes: it was beautiful, and as he contemplated it from the outside with a triumphant lassitude he thought vaguely of the new life that he now had the right to begin.

The book was not to be on sale until the Leipzig Fair, but the author could not wait so long before sending it to Charlotte at least. He often tried to imagine when and how she would read it. Perhaps she would begin *Werther* one evening, in bed, her firm breasts out-

lined under the delicate linen: or perhaps sitting in an armchair opposite Kestner, who would be a little jealous and try to find out without being observed what his wife was feeling. She would know for the first time what Goethe's love had been. She would doubtless blush when she came to the passionate scenes at the end, to the furious kisses which he had never given her and which, by an almost magical art, he could now force her to receive. . . . And dear Max Brentano? She too would doubtless fall to dreaming.

As soon as he had received the first volumes from the printer he packed up two copies, one for Charlotte and one for Kestner, and wrote to Lotte: "You will realize when you read this book how dear it is to me; and this copy above all I value as much as if it were the only one in the world. It is for you, Lotte: I have kissed it a hundred times, and I kept it shut up so that no one might touch it. Oh Lotte, I want each of you to read it by yourselves and separately. You by yourself and Kestner by himself, and then I want each of you to write me a line. Lotte—good-bye, Lotte."

Kestner and his wife smiled and hastened to

obey. They each took one of the little volumes and opened it with affectionate eagerness.

Charlotte was a little uneasy. She knew Goethe's ardent nature, his refusal to restrain the violence of his feelings, to accept the useful conventions of the world. In real life, the fear of committing himself, of missing opportunities, had nearly always in the end confined this torrent of lava to a channel. But what would Goethe be like when let loose?

As soon as she had read the first pages she realized that her husband would be severely tried. The scene at the ball, so natural in her recollection, had here, she knew not how, taken on a passionate sensuality. "To hold the most charming of creatures in my arms!

"Fly with her like the storm! See everything about one pass and fade! To feel . . . It was then I vowed that a woman I loved should valse with none but me though I died for it! You will understand me."

Charlotte sat pensive. To be quite frank with herself, she had understood from the first day that Goethe loved her in this way. It was an idea that had slipped into the recesses of

her consciousness: she had kept it carefully shut up there and had long since succeeded in forgetting this discreet and disturbing presence. Yet the recollection was there, for as she read the burning sentences, Charlotte felt the sweet uneasy impression of a reminiscence.

When she came to the passage: "What fire runs through all my veins when my finger happens to touch hers, when our feet come together under the table. I start away as from a flame, but a secret force draws me back once more. I am seized with giddiness and my senses are in a whirl. Ah! her innocence, the purity of her soul prevent her from realizing how the slightest familiarities put me to the torture. When she puts her hand on mine, as she talks to me. . . ." Charlotte put the book down and reflected for some time. Had she not, in moments like those of which she had just read the description, nearly always guessed Goethe's agitation, and found it not at all displeasing? Even now to read the account of it made her, she had to admit, surprisingly happy. She reproached herself for her coquetry. She looked at her husband sitting opposite her: he was rapidly turning over the

pages of the little volume with a gloomy and worried expression.

After a short interval he raised his eyes in his turn and asked her what she was thinking about. He seemed angry and ill at ease. "It is a disgraceful act," he said warmly. "Goethe describes people who at the outset are like ourselves and then he changes them in some way into false and romantic characters. . . . What sort of creature is this sentimental Lotte who weeps unceasingly over Werther's hand? . . . Did you ever say, 'Oh, Klopstock,' and look up at the sky, especially to a young man whom you had only just met? I find it difficult to picture you in such a part. . . . Ah! I can now see clearly that Goethe has never understood what gives you your charm. It is I alone, Charlotte, I alone who understand that. What is so attractive in you is just your perfect simplicity, that is never out of place, that joyous and natural self-possession of yours that banishes all evil thoughts. But he has even spoilt his own portrait. The real Goethe behaved much better than Werther. There was something fine and generous about our relations during those four months which

he has not been able to express. . . . As for myself, whom he has described as so destitute of sensibility, I whose heart 'does not beat sympathetically at the reading of a favourite book,' am I so cold as all that? Oh, I know very well that if I had had to lose you, Lotte, it is I who would have been Werther."

At this instant husband and wife drew near to each other, and there followed a little scene of conjugal affection which would not, perhaps, have been exactly in accordance with the author's wishes. They finished the book together, side by side and hand in hand. At the end of it Kestner, at any rate, was in a state of acute anger. The transformation of their innocent simple story into a tragic adventure seemed to him really abominable. He was indeed a monster—this two-headed individual who was both Goethe and Jérusalem. And no doubt Kestner did not fail to notice that the account of the last interview between Werther and his beloved was taken entirely from the letter that he had himself written to Goethe about the death of Jérusalem. But when he was confronted with a heroine whose name was Lotte, and who at the beginning

of the book had been described with all Lotte's characteristics, he was as hurt as if some coarse-minded painter had taken the face and person of his wife for the subject of an obscene picture.

Charlotte herself was more moved than displeased, but she could imagine and sympathize with her husband's feelings, and in order to soothe him she said she thought he was right. Besides, she shared his apprehensions. What would be said about them in their own circle? All their friends in Wetzlar and even in Hanover could not fail to recognize them. How would it be possible to explain which parts of the book faithfully presented them and which were alien additions? How could they escape all the malicious and quite natural gossip? If they had been less sensitive they would have realized that society is, in general, profoundly indifferent and forgetful, and what seemed now so very important would be quite forgotten in six months. But Wisdom and Pain seldom keep house together. They felt that their happy retired life had been wrecked by their friend's indiscretion.

X

ON the following day Kestner wrote to Goethe in terms of severe displeasure. "It is true that you have interwoven some alien elements into each character and that you have blended several persons into one. Well and good. But if in these processes of interweaving and blending you had consulted your heart, the real people whose characteristics you have borrowed would not have been prostituted in this way. You wished to draw from nature in order to give verisimilitude to your picture, and you have combined together so many contradictory elements that you have failed in your purpose. The real Lotte would indeed be a poor creature if she were like your Lotte. And Lotte's husband—you called him your friend, and God knows whether he was so—is in like case.

"What a wretched object Albert is! If he had to be commonplace, was it necessary

to make him such an utter idiot for you to be able to dominate him so haughtily and say: 'See what a fine fellow I am' ?"

Goethe had for several days waited very impatiently for Kestner's and Lotte's opinions. He hoped for two long and enthusiastic letters, a list of passages that had more especially struck them, some quotations perhaps, a reminder of incidents that he had forgotten or missed out. He broke the seal with a cheerful sense of curiosity and was dumbfounded to come upon this bitter criticism. Was it possible that an intelligent man could so little understand the nature of a book? Why should he want Werther to be Goethe? "No doubt there are elements of Werther in me. But I was suddenly rescued from all that by something that is called Will. Take this away from Goethe and Werther will be left. Take away his imagination and we shall find Albert. Why does he say that Albert is a wretched creature? Why should I have made Albert commonplace? The beauty of my subject is that though Albert and Werther are opposed to each other, they fight on equal terms. Besides, what makes Kestner think that he is Albert?

Does he believe that I am incapable of discovering a reasonable being in myself?"

The more he thought it over, the more he re-read Kestner's letter, the less he understood it and the more astonished he was. Yet it was distressing to him to think that he was giving his friends pain. He tried for a long time to find a means of pacifying them. But what was he to do? Not publish his novel? He had not the courage for that sacrifice.

"I must write at once and unburden my soul to you, my dear angry friends. The thing is done, the book is out; forgive me if you can. I will not listen to anything until events have proved how exaggerated are your fears, until you come to see in the book itself the harmless mingling of fact and fiction that it contains. . . . And now, my dears, when you feel anger rising within you, think, only think, that your old friend Goethe is always, always, and now more than ever, yours."

The publication of the book involved the Kestners, as they had anticipated, in requests for explanations and expressions of sympathy. Lotte's brother, Hans Buff, sent them the impression of the Teutonic House. There,

at least, everyone knew Goethe, and young Werther's sufferings had had an uproarious success.

"By the way," wrote Hans, "have you read *Werther?* What do you think of it? The situation here is singular. There are only two copies in the whole town, and as everyone wants to read the book, everyone steals them as best he can. Yesterday evening, Papa, Caroline, Lele, Wilhelm and I were all of us reading a single copy whose cover we had torn off. Each page passed through five hands. . . . Poor Werther! We laughed a great deal when we read it. Did he laugh too when he wrote it?"

Kestner had to assure his officious friends who sent their condolences, that his home life was happy, that his wife had always loved him, that Goethe had never thought of committing suicide, and that a novel was only a novel. Finally, Charlotte induced him to write Goethe a letter granting him absolution.

But there was little question of forgiveness. The young author was completely carried away. All Germany was now shedding tears over Werther's fate. The young men wore

his blue frock-coat and yellow waistcoat and his brown-topped boots. The young women copied Charlotte's dresses, and above all the white dress with pink bows that she had worn at her first meeting with her friend. In every garden romantic hearts raised little monuments to Werther's memory. Climbing plants twined themselves about Wertherian urns. Songs and poems were written about Werther. The French themselves, so often contemptuous, welcomed this disciple of Rousseau with enthusiasm. Europe had not been so roused by a work of the imagination since *The New Héloïse.*

Goethe answered in a tone which was scarcely that of a penitent. "O ye of little faith! If you could feel the thousandth part of what Werther stands for in a thousand hearts you would not even stop to think of the sacrifice that you have made for him. I would not, to save my own life, see Werther suppressed. Kestner, believe me, believe in me, your fears and your uneasiness will vanish away like the phantoms of a night. If you are generous, and if you do not worry me, I will send you letters, tears, sighs over

Werther; and if you have faith, believe me, all will go well and gossip does not matter. Lotte, good-bye: Kestner, love me and do not bother me any more."

After this date his correspondence with the Kestners became extremely desultory.

Thenceforward, embalmed and enshrined in his sentences, they had lost for him the greater part of their reality. Once a year, over a long period, he wrote them letters which began "My dear Children," to ask for news of a continually increasing family. Then the excellent Kestner died.

In 1816 Frau Sekretärin Kestner, a widow of fifty-nine, plain but pleasantly good-humoured, came to visit His Excellency the Minister of State von Goethe at Weimar. She hoped that the great man might be useful to her sons August and Theodore, especially to Theodore, who wished to devote himself to the study of natural science.

She found a cultivated but worn-out old gentleman in whose features she looked in vain for the face of the wild youth of Wetzlar, whom no one could help loving. Conversation

was difficult. Goethe, who did not know what to say, showed her prints and dried plants. Each of them read in the other's eyes astonishment and disillusion.

The Minister finally offered the old lady his own box at the theatre, excusing himself for not being able to join her there later. She thought as she went out, "if I had met him by accident and without knowing his name, he would have made no impression on me."

The truth is that Doctor Goethe had long been dead: dead too was Fräulein Lotte Buff, who had so loved dancing and walks by moonlight. Of all the characters in this story one was only still alive, and that was the unhappy Werther.

The Second Circle of Mape
or
The Reader

It Was Monsieur De Balzac's Fault

Life imitates Art much more than Art imitates Life.

—Oscar Wilde

IT WAS MONSIEUR DE BALZAC'S FAULT

THE evening had been spent in smoking cigarettes and passing judgments on men and their works when, towards midnight, the conversation suddenly flickered up once more like a flame from embers that had seemed extinct, awakening the astonished sleeper to a room full of light.

Apropos of a friend of ours, apparently rather a frivolous woman, who had surprised us all by entering the Carmelite Order on the day before, we had gone on to speak of the inconsistency of people's characters and the difficulty found by even an intelligent observer in foreseeing the simplest acts of the human beings around him.

"What puzzles me," I had said, "is how we can foresee anything at all when the character of each of us contains every possible contradiction. An accident brings to the surface one particular group of passions; you find yourself classified and judged, a social dummy

pinned for ever in an heroic or a discreditable attitude. But the label on the dummy is rarely a true description. Cynical thoughts cross the minds of men who live the lives of saints. They dismiss them because the manner of life that they have accepted leaves no place for them; but suppose that circumstances had displayed the same figures in another shop-window, their reactions to the same ideas would have been different. The contrary is also true, and the noblest motives pass like reflections in water across the minds of criminals. Personality is therefore quite an arbitrary term. For the convenience of speech and action we are allowed to say A is a rake: B is a saint; but to an analyst with any honesty, character is a shifting quantity."

Mathis had protested at this. "Yes," said he, "what you call a personality is, in fact, nothing but a chaos of sensations, recollections and tendencies, which has no power to organize itself. But you seem to forget that it can be organized from without. A belief can attract these little scattered elements just as a magnet can attract steel filings. A great love, a religious faith, a prejudice more powerful than

the rest, brings into the mental life the invisible framework that was wanting and enables it to reach that condition of equilibrium which is, in fact, happiness. The soul's support, its anchorage, must always be outside itself, and that is why . . . Well, read the *Imitation* again. 'When You abandon me to myself I see that I am but weakness and merely nothing; when I seek for You alone and love You with a heart that is truly pure, I have found You and I have found myself with You.' "

At this moment Renaud abruptly closed the book which he had been looking at, got up as he nearly always does when he wants to say something, and stood in front of the large stove which heats our host's studio.

"Faith?" said he, lighting his pipe. "Yes, faith and passion can reduce the mind to order. Yes, certainly. . . . But for a man like myself who is no longer fortunate enough to be able to believe or to love, the chief among the forces of equilibrium is rather, I think, the imaginary world of art, and more especially of fiction. I take it that what is essential is that the mind, having constructed a character that

satisfies it, should then make every effort to be loyal to that ideal. Well, oddly enough, novels and plays help me to model this mask which is so indispensable to what I am very willing to call, using the words in a secular sense, our salvation. When I have lost my way; when I am looking for myself in vain among this medley of contradictory desires, of which Maurois was speaking just now, when I feel dull and (as often happens) when I dislike myself, I take up once more certain books that I have been fond of and try to recapture the atmosphere of the feelings that they once aroused. As I look at my model I see once more before me the ideal portrait of myself that I drew in days gone by. I recognize the mask I chose. I am saved. . . . In a word, Tolstoy's Prince André, Stendhal's Fabrice, the Goethe of *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* these are the forces of order in my chaos. And I do not think that my case is very uncommon. . . . Did not Rousseau in his time influence, and even call into being, the feelings of several million Frenchmen? So did d'Annunzio in Modern Italy: so did Wilde in certain sections of English society at the end

of the last century. And what of Chateaubriand . . . Ruskin . . . and Barrès?"

"Excuse me," one of us interrupted, "did they call into being the feelings of their time or did they merely record them?"

"Record them? Not a bit of it. The types described by a greater writer are the aspirations of an epoch, not its offspring. The courteous and gallant Knight of the Epics was conceived among barbarians: he then transformed his readers, who, as they read about him, gradually changed into his semblance. The magnanimous cinema hero of Los Angeles is the ideal of a nation of money-makers. Art offers us ideals, man realizes them, and in doing so makes them useless as artistic material. When France was full of actual Manfreds and Renés she grew sick of the Romantic idea. Proust will create for us a generation of analysts who will loathe analytical novels and care for nothing but the unadorned beauty of a simple narrative.

"An excellent subject for a story by Hoffman or Pirandello," said Ramon. "The novelist's characters come to life and curse him."

"It is quite certain, my dear Ramon, that what I have said is true to the smallest detail. The very gestures of your characters will one day become those of the real world. Do you remember a sentence of Gide? 'There were many secret Werthers, though they did not know it, who only waited for the pistol shot of Goethe's Werther to go and do likewise.' I myself know a man whose whole life was changed by one simple act of a character in a story by Balzac."

"Did you know," said Ramon, "that during a whole season at Venice a party of French people conceived the idea of taking the names of the principal characters in Balzac and impersonating them as well? At the Café Florian one met no one but Rastignac, Goriot, Nathan, and the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse: several of the actresses felt in honour bound to play their parts to the bitter end. . . ."

"That must have been delightful," Renaud went on: "still, that was only a game, whereas in the case of the man I am talking about it was his real life, his sole and only life, whose course was suddenly changed under the influence of a literary recollection. He was

with me at the École Normale,* and his name was Lecadieu: the most remarkable lad among a group of seniors who were certainly not below the average."

"In what way remarkable?"

"In every way. . . . A powerful and original personality . . . an acute intellect . . . extraordinarily learned. . . . He had read everything, from the Fathers of the Church to the *Nibelungen Lied,* from the Byzantine historians to Karl Marx, and had been able to penetrate to something universal and human behind all their phrases. When he gave a history lesson we left the room entranced. I remember especially a description of Catiline's conspiracy. It was wonderful. He was a great historian and at the same time a great romancer . . . indeed he was more passionately devoted to novels than anyone I have ever met. Stendhal and Balzac were his gods. He knew many passages by heart,

* *Ecole Normale.* A State Institution whose primary object is the training of teachers for the State Secondary Schools. The entrance qualification is a high one, and many of the most eminent political and literary figures in France, during the last hundred years, have passed through it.

and all his knowledge of the world seemed to come from novels.

"His physique was not unlike theirs. He was powerfully built, but with an intelligent, unmistakably kindly and almost monumental ugliness that nearly always conceals the great romancer. I say 'nearly always,' because other and less visible defects, want of character, a vice of some kind, or adversity may arouse this need of reincarnation without which there can be no creator. Tolstoy in his youth was hideous, Balzac ponderous, Dostoievsky faun-like, and Lecadieu's face in his youth always recalled Stendhal's at the time he left Grenoble.

"He was obviously poor. He took me several times to see his brother-in-law, who was an engineer at Bellville, where we dined in the kitchen: he exhibited him to the whole school with a kind of ostentation. This was a feeling very much in the manner of Julien Sorel,* and indeed everything made it clear that the character haunted his mind. When he talked about the scene in the garden in the dark when Julien seized Madame de Rènal's

* A character in Stendhal's *Rouge et Noir.*

hand without any feeling of affection for her, he looked as if he were telling the story of his life.

"Circumstances did not allow him to try his courage on any but waitresses in the Duval restaurants, or models at the Café Rotonde, but we knew that he was impatiently waiting for the time when he could perhaps make conquests of proud, passionate and chaste women.

" 'I might force my way into the drawing-rooms by a great work which fools and snobs could not ignore,' he said to me, 'yes, I might do that.

" 'But what a time it would take! Besides, how can one write a good book unless one knows really exquisite women? But women, Renaud, real women—we must face the fact —are only to be found in the great world. If these complicated fragile creatures are to come to their perfection they need idleness, wealth, an atmosphere of luxury and weariness.

" 'The rest? They may be desirable, and they may be beautiful, but what do they bring? Sensual love? The love of two bodies or the monotonous dull devotion of a lifetime?

I care nothing for that. What I want is the pride of victory, a background of romance. Perhaps I am wrong, and yet—no. How can one be wrong in fulfilling one's own nature? I am romantic, my friend, desperately romantic, consciously romantic. If I am to be happy I must be loved, and, since I am ugly, I must be powerful before I can be loved. My whole scheme of life is based on this, and whatever you may say it is the only sensible one *for me.*'

"At this time I was in possession of all the wisdom which bad health can give, and Lecadieu's scheme of life seemed to me utterly absurd.

" 'I am sorry for you,' I answered, 'and I don't understand you. You condemn yourself to a state of agitation and uneasiness (you are in it already), and probably to defeat at the hands of adversaries who will be unworthy of you. What does it matter to me if others have the appearance of success if I have the reality within me? . . . After all, what is it you want, Lecadieu? Happiness? Do you really suppose that power or even women can

give it you? What you call real life I call illusion. How can you desire what is imperfect, and, by its very nature, treacherous, when you have the opportunity of being one of those who can devote their lives to ideas, and win a happiness that is almost unassailable?'

"He shrugged his shoulders. 'Yes, yes,' he said: 'I know all about that. I have read the Stoics too. I tell you again and again I am different from them and from you. Yes, no doubt I could find a kind of provisional happiness in books, in art and in work. Then when I was thirty, or forty, I should regret my wasted life. It would be too late. I have in mind quite another disposition of my spiritual career. First I shall get rid of the obsession of ambition by the only effective remedy, which is to satisfy it, and then—and only then —I shall pass the rest of my life in a condition of wisdom which will be all the more genuine because I shall know what I despise. That is my idea; and a really distinguished mistress would save me six years of disappointments and low intrigues.'

"I recollect an incident which at the time I had found some difficulty in understanding,

but which now seems to throw a great deal of light on his character. He had found an ugly dirty Irish girl in some café and could not rest until he had spent the night with her. I thought the affair all the more absurd because she hardly spoke any French, and the only 'lacuna' in our omniscient Lecadieu was his complete ignorance of English.

" 'But what an extraordinary notion,' I said to him more than once; 'you don't even understand what she says.'

" 'You are a very poor psychologist,' he answered: 'don't you see that that is exactly where all the pleasure comes in?'

"You understand the workings of his mind? Since he could not find in his usual mistresses the distinction and modesty that were essential to his happiness, he looked for the illusion of these qualities in the mystery of an unknown language.

"He had numerous secret notebooks packed with private notes, plans and schemes for works. These schemes were very varied, ranging from a general History of the World to a Geometry of Morals. One evening, as he had left one of these notebooks on his table,

we were wicked enough to look into it, and we found some reflections that amused us a great deal. I have remembered one of them which was very much in Lecadieu's manner: 'A failure proves that the desire was feeble, not that it was indiscreet.'

"At the top of one page was a sort of heading: 'Possibilities,' and below:

Musset was a great poet at twenty . . .	Hopeless.
Hoche and Napoleon were generals commanding armies at twenty four .	Hopeless.
Gambetta was a famous lawyer at twenty-five .	Possible.
Stendhal did not publish *The Red and the Black* until he was forty-eight . .	More likely.

"This agenda of ambition seemed to us rather absurd at the time, though after all the hypothesis—Lecadieu, man of genius—was far from being absurd. If we had been asked: 'Which of you has any chance of getting out of the ruck, of making a real name for

himself?' we should have answered, 'Lecadieu,' but good fortune was also essential. In the life of every potential great man there happens at a given moment an infinitesimal incident which flings open the door to success. What would have become of Bonaparte without the days of Vendémiaire at St. Roch, or of Byron without the lashings of the Scottish critics? Moreover, Byron was lame, which is an asset to an artist, and Bonaparte was timid and afraid of women. Our Lecadieu himself was ugly, he was poor and full of talent, but would he find his St. Roch?

"At the beginning of our third year the Head-master sent for some of us to come to his study. He was one Perrot, an excellent fellow who combined the appearance of a wild boar just emerged from a bath and of a Cyclops, for he had only one eye and a terrific appearance. When people asked his advice as to their future he replied, 'Oh, the future . . . when you leave here try to find a good appointment, well paid, with as little work as possible.'

"That day, as we were all standing round him, he made us the following little speech:

"'You know Trélivan, the Minister, by name? You do? Very good. Monsieur Trélivan has just sent his Secretary to see me. He is looking for a tutor for his sons, and wants to know if one of you would be willing to give lessons in history, literature and Latin three times a week. The hours will be chosen so as not to interfere in any way with your lectures here. I should, of course, give every facility that may be needed. In my opinion this is a chance of securing distinguished patronage, and perhaps, when you have left school, of getting some comfortable sinecure which will keep you warm for the rest of your days. At any rate it is worth considering: think it over, make up your minds together, come back this evening and let me have the name of one of you.'

"We all knew Trélivan, the friend of Jules Ferry, and of Challemel-Lacour, the most cultivated and clever of all the statesmen of the time. In his youth he astonished the Latin Quarter by standing on a table and declaiming the Catilines and Philippics. Old Hase, the venerable professor of Greek at the Sorbonne, said he had never had a better pupil. Even

when in power he still retained an unconventionality that delighted us. He quoted poetry when he was speaking in the Chamber. When the attacks of his opponents became too offensive (it was at the time of the assaults on Tonkin and the Opposition was ferocious), he opened a Theocritus or a Plato and gave up listening altogether. The mere idea of wanting a teacher for his children as young as we were, instead of one of their usual masters, was quite in Trélivan's manner and we liked it.

"I would have willingly gone to his house for a few hours a week, but Lecadieu being 'cacique' * had the right of priority and his answer was easy to foresee. Here was the opportunity for which he must be longing so anxiously. He was entering, on a footing of equality, the house of an influential personage whose secretary he might one day become, and who would certainly launch him into that mysterious world which our friend aspired to dominate. He asked for the appointment, got it, and on the following day he entered on his duties.

* Senior pupil in the École Normale.

"Lecadieu and I had fallen into the habit of having a long talk every evening on the dormitory landing. In this way, even at the end of the first week, I learnt a thousand details about the Trélivan household. Lecadieu had only seen the Minister once, and then he had had to wait till nine o'clock in the evening, as the sitting of the Chamber had lasted a long while.

" 'Well,' said I, 'and what did the great man say?'

" 'I was disappointed at first,' said Lecadieu. 'One would really rather a great man was not a man at all: as soon as one sees eyes, nose and mouth, as soon one hears sentences made up of the usual words, it is as though a mirage were dissolving. But he is agreeable, friendly and intelligent. He talked to me about the school, asked me questions about the literary tastes of the present generation, and then took me to see his wife, who, according to him, is more concerned with the children's education than he is. She received me kindly: she seems afraid of him, and he gives one the feeling of putting on a rather ironical tone when he talks to her.'

" 'That is a good sign, Lecadieu. Is she pretty?'

" 'Very pretty.'

" 'But not very young, as she has two sons?'

" 'About thirty . . . perhaps a little more.'

"On the following Sunday we were invited to lunch by a former master at the school who had become a deputy. He was a friend of Gambetta, Bouteillier and Trélivan, and Lecadieu took the opportunity of getting some information.

" 'Do you know who Madame Trélivan was before her marriage?'

" 'Madame Trélivan? I think she was the daughter of some business man in the Eure-et-Loir Department. . . . A good middle-class family, as far as I can remember.'

" 'She is intelligent,' said Lecadieu in that indefinable tone that is partly a question and partly an assertion, and is, in fact, possibly the desire to hear one's hopes confirmed.

" 'Surely not,' said old Lefort with an air of surprise. 'Why should she be? Indeed I fancy she is generally thought stupid. My colleague Jules Lemaître, who is a friend of the family . . .'

"Lecadieu bent across the table and interrupted suddenly. 'Is she virtuous?'

"'Who? Madame Trélivan? As to that, my boy . . . Well, they say she has lovers: personally I know nothing about it. It seems probable. Trélivan does not pay her much attention. They say he lives with Mademoiselle Marsay whom he got into the Comédie Française when he was Minister of Fine Arts. I know his friends visit him at Mademoiselle Marsay's and he spends nearly all his evenings there.'

"'So . . .'

"The Deputy for Caen spread out his hands, nodded significantly and began to talk about the ensuing elections.

"From the day after this conversation the attitude of Lecadieu towards Madame Trélivan became more open and unconstrained. The commonplace remarks which he exchanged with her when she came into the room during a lesson were touched with a kind of veiled assurance. He now looked at her with increasing freedom. She always wore rather low-cut dresses which suggested the curve of her bosom under the covering of tulle. Her

shoulders and arms had that rounded firmness which precedes, without anticipating, the heavier lines of middle age. She had no wrinkles, or at any rate Lecadieu was too young to guess the presence of those imperceptible lines. When she sat down she displayed the neatest ankles, which the delicate network of silk seemed to raise above merely carnal matter. Lecadieu thought her divine, both for her beauty and the shadows of experience that hovered round her mortal body, which might yet be his, since rumour said that she was yielding.

"I have told you that Lecadieu's eloquence was original and powerful. On several occasions when Madame Trélivan had come in while he was amusing himself by conjuring up before the children's astonished eyes Rome of the Cæsars, the court of Cleopatra, or the builders of cathedrals, it pleased his rather insolent fancy not to break off. She made a sign for him to go on, and walking on tiptoe quietly took a chair. 'Oh, yes,' said Lecadieu to himself, watching her while he talked, 'you are thinking that many famous orators are less interesting than this little schoolboy.' He

was probably wrong, and as she stared at the tips of her shoes or the prismatic fires of her diamond ring, she was more likely thinking about her boot-maker or a new setting for the stone.

"Still, she came again. Lecadieu kept an account of her appearances with a meticulous precision which she was certainly far from suspecting. If she had been faithful for three days: 'She is nibbling,' he thought. And as he went over in his mind what he had said, and all the hints and indications he had ventured, he tried to remember how Madame Trélivan had received them. She had smiled at that; she had not been much impressed by that remark which was surely bright enough; and that rather risky allusion had brought him a look of surprise and offended dignity. If she did not come for a week: 'All is over,' he said to himself: 'she is tired of me.' At this time he invented countless devices for finding out from the children, without arousing their curiosity, what had prevented their mother from coming. It was always some simple reason. She was away, or ill, or presiding over some committee of ladies.

" 'You see,' said Lecadieu to me, 'when one discovers that feelings, that in our own case are so violent, are powerless to raise a similar storm in someone else, how one would like to . . . ! Above all, it is awful to be in ignorance. The utter mystery in which the other's thoughts are hidden is mainly responsible for these violent feelings. If one could read what was passing in their minds one would not suffer unduly. One would possess them or give them up. But this calm demeanour, which perhaps conceals a passionate curiosity and perhaps conceals nothing. . .'

"One day she asked him for the names of a few books, and a short conversation took place. The quarter of an hour's talk after the lesson became a habit, and Lecadieu soon changed his scholastic tone into the sort of banter, at once so solemn and so silly, which nearly always serves as a prelude to passages of love. Have you noticed, in conversations between men and women, how the tone of pleasantry is only there to mask the intensity of the desire? It is almost as if they were conscious of the force that is carrying them away and the danger that threatens them, and

were anxious to preserve their peace by the feigned indifference of their words. Every turn of speech then becomes an allusion, every phrase an attempt to fathom depths unknown, and every compliment is a caress. Speech and feeling then slide over two superimposed planes, and the upper one, where the words pass, can only be interpreted as a sign and symbol of the other, over which move a medley of sensual images. This ardent young man who wished to dominate France by his genius had submitted to talking about the latest plays, novels, dress, and even about the weather. He came to me with descriptions of black tulle capes or white toques with Louis XV knots (it was the era of leg-of-mutton sleeves and bonnets perched high up on the head).

" 'Old Lefort was right,' he said. 'She is not very intelligent. To be more exact, she never thinks except on the surface of herself. But I don't care.'

"When he spoke to her he looked at the hand that Julien had seized, the waist round which Felix de Vandenesse * had placed his arm. 'How,' he asked himself, 'can one change from

* A character in Balzac's *Lys dans la Vallée.*

this ceremonious tone, this stiff demeanour, to the astonishing familiarity that is presupposed by love? With the women that I have known until now the preliminary moves were jests that were always allowed and even provoked: the rest followed as a matter of course. But with her I find it impossible to imagine the slightest caress. Julien? But Julien had the advantage of dark evenings in a garden, the collusion of a lovely night, days spent together. . . . But I cannot even see her alone."

The children were, indeed, always present, and Lecadieu watched Madame Trélivan's eyes in vain for a look of encouragement or a sign of understanding. She looked at him calmly, and with a self-possession that gave no opportunity for any casual freedoms.

"Every time he left the Trélivan's house he wandered along the quays, reflecting. . . . 'I am just a coward. . . . That woman has had lovers. She is at least fifteen years older than I; she cannot be very unaccommodating. It is true that her husband is a remarkable man. But do wives notice such things? Besides, what does it matter? He neglects her

and she seems bored to distraction.' And he repeated angrily, 'I am just a coward, a coward.'

"He would have felt less contempt for himself at that time if he had been better acquainted with the real state of Madame Trélivan's heart. I obtained some information on that subject much later from a woman who, during that period of her life, stood in the same relation to her as I did to Lecadieu. Sometimes, after twenty years, chance throws in our way some odd fragments of a story which would have been so intensely interesting at the time.

"Thérèse Trelivan had married for love. She was, as we had been told, the daughter of a manufacturer, a Voltairean and Republican manufacturer, a type of the French middle-class which is now rare, but was extremely common towards the close of the Empire. Trélivan, in the course of one of his electoral campaigns, had stayed with Thérèse's parents and aroused her admiration. It was she who suggested the marriage. She had to overcome the opposition of a family who, quite rightly, confronted her with Tré-

livan's reputation as a man much given to women and a terrible gambler. Her father had said: 'Trélivan is a rake who will be unfaithful to you and ruin you.' She had replied: 'I will reform him.'

"Those who knew her at that time say that her beauty, her simplicity and her need of affection made so charming a combination that she was quite irresistible. In marrying a Deputy who was still young and already celebrated she had pictured to herself a noble life in common, dedicated to a kind of apostolic mission. She saw herself inspiring her husband's speeches, copying them, and applauding them: his loyal support when times were difficult, a self-effacing and valued comrade in his successes. In a word she had transfigured her youthful girlish ardours into something like political passion.

"The marriage turned out as might have been expected. Trélivan's love for his wife lasted as long as his desire of her—that is to say, about three months. Then he abruptly ceased to take any notice of her existence. With his ironical realistic mind and his horror of enthusiasm, he had been much less touched

than irritated by a fervour that had been possibly inconvenient.

"Simplicity of character, which appeals to intellectuals, irritates men of action. He had rejected this domestic partnership affectionately at first, then politely and then curtly. Her first children, and the precautions she had to take before they were born, served him as a pretext for getting away from the house. He had gone back to friends whose temperament was more like his own. When his wife complained he told her that she was free to do as she pleased. After she had made up her mind not to get a divorce, because of the children, because she was still proud of being Madame Trélivan, but above all, perhaps, because she would not admit her defeat to her family, she had painfully to accustom herself to travelling alone with the children, submitting to her friends' officious pity, and smiling when people asked her if her husband was away.

"At last, after six years of semi-desertion, weary of everything and haunted by a need for affection that she hardly realized, tortured, in spite of her deception, by her dream

of pure and perfect love, she took as a lover a colleague and political friend of Trélivan, a conceited, ill-conditioned person, who also left her after a few months.

"These two unfortunate experiences had inspired her with the deepest mistrust of all men. She smiled and sighed sadly when anyone spoke of marriage in her company. She had been a bright and lively girl: she became silent and languid. The doctors found her an obedient patient, incurably neurasthenic. She lived in the constant expectation of disaster or of death. Above all, she had completely lost that gracious self-possession that had made her so delightful in her youth. She thought that no one could love her, and that she did not deserve to be loved.

"The Easter holidays arrived: they interrupted the children's studies and gave Lecadieu time for a meditation of considerable length from which he emerged with his mind made up. On the day after he went back, when the lesson was over, he asked Madame Trélivan for a private interview. She thought he had a complaint to make about one of his pupils and took him into a small drawing-

room. As he followed her he felt completely calm, as one does before a duel which has been accepted as inevitable. As soon as she had shut the door behind her, he told her that he could no longer keep silence, that he lived only for the minutes that he passed in her company, that her face was continually before his eyes—in short, an utterly artificial and literary declaration of affection. After which he attempted to come close to her and take her hands.

"She looked at him with annoyance and embarrassment, and said several times: 'But it's absurd . . . please don't talk like that' . . . Finally she said: 'It's ridiculous, please stop, and go away.' He drew back and went out, saying in a low voice: 'I will ask Mr. Perrot to get someone else to take your sons.'

"He stopped for a moment in the hall, feeling a little dazed, and wandered about for a few seconds looking for his hat, with the result that a footman who heard him came out of the servants' quarters and went after him to open the door.

"At this moment, his departure in the capacity of a dismissed lover, and the footman

standing behind him, suddenly reminded my friend of a Balzac story that he had just been reading, a short but very fine story called *The Deserted Wife.*

"Do you all remember *The Deserted Wife?* Ah! you are not true Balzacians. . . . I must, therefore, remind you, so that you may understand what follows, that in this story a young man obtains admission to a lady's house on a false pretext and, without more ado, makes her the most extravagant declaration of love. She darts a haughty and contemptuous look at him and says to the footman, for whom she has rung: 'James, (or John): show this gentleman out.' Up to this point that is what happened to Lecadieu.

"But, in Balzac, the young man reflects as he is crossing the vestibule: 'If I leave the house, that woman will always think me a fool: perhaps at this moment she is feeling sorry that she dismissed me so abruptly: let us see what she means.' He then says to the footman: 'I have forgotten something,' goes up the stairs again, finds Madame de Beauséant still in the drawing-room, and becomes her lover.

"'Yes,' thought Lecadieu, as he looked awkwardly about for his belongings, 'that is my situation exactly; and not only will she think me a fool, but she will tell her husband, and that will be very trying. On the other hand, if I see her again . . .'

"He said to the footman, 'I have forgotten my gloves,' crossed the hall at a run, and opened the door of the boudoir once more.

"Madame Trélivan was pensively sitting on a small chair by the fireplace. She looked at him with astonishment and then said very gently:

"'What? Is it you again? I thought . . .'

"'I told the footman I had forgotten my gloves. I beg you to hear me for five minutes.'

"She did not protest, and it seems certain that during the few moments' reflection that my friend's departure had allowed her, she had regretted her attack of virtue. That very human instinct which prompts us to despise what is offered to us and cling to what is slipping from our grasp is no doubt the explanation of the fact that, having sent him away in good faith, when she heard him go she had wanted to see him again.

"Thérèse Trélivan was thirty years old. Once more, and perhaps for the last time, life would become for her a blend of pain and joy, terrible and delightful: once more she would become familiar with secret meetings, hidden letters, the endless arguments of jealousy. Her lover would be a youth who had, possibly, a touch of genius. She could, perhaps, once more indulge in that dream of maternal protection, which her husband had cut short so abruptly, with a man who would owe her everything.

"Did she love him? I haven't an idea; but I incline to think that before that moment she had never thought of him otherwise than as her sons' brilliant tutor, not in any way because she had despised him, but from modesty. When he came towards her after a speech of considerable length, of which she had heard nothing, she held out her hand and turned away her eyes with an infinitely graceful movement. This was quite in the manner of Lecadieu's heroines and he kissed the hand with genuine passion.

"That evening he made an honest effort to conceal his happiness from me: discretion

was part of a lover's character, as novels had taught him to imagine it. He held out during dinner and for a part of the evening. I remember that we had an animated discussion of Monsieur Anatole France's first book, then just out; and that Lecadieu analyzed with much ingenuity what he described as 'its rather too conscious poetry.' About ten o'clock he took me aside and told me the story of the day's events.

"'I ought not to tell you all this, but I should choke if I could not confide in someone. I staked everything on one card, my friend; I played steadily, and I won. Therefore, with women, audacity and nothing else is what you need. My ideas of love, which amused you because they came out of books, remain true in fact. Balzac is a great man.'

"Upon which he entered on a long account of what had happened, and when he had finished he put his hands on my shoulders and said:

"'Life is a fine thing, Renaud.'

"'I think,' said I, shaking him off, 'that you are shouting "Victory" a little too early.

She has forgiven your audacity: that is the meaning of what she did. But the difficulties remain.'

" 'Ah!' said Lecadieu. 'You did not see the way she looked at me. She suddenly became charming. But one is never mistaken about a woman's feelings, my friend. I myself felt that she was for a long time indifferent to me. When I tell you she loves me I know it is true.'

"I listened with that ironical and almost bored surprise that is nearly always inspired by other people's love affairs. Yet he had good reason for thinking he had won the game: a week later Madame Trélivan was his mistress. He had conducted the decisive operations with great skill, prepared himself for each meeting, planning his gestures and his words beforehand. His success was the triumph of an amorous strategy that was almost scientific.

"According to the common theories, possession marks the end of a passionate love. Lecadieu's case proves, on the contrary, that possession may serve to start the mechanism. It is true that the woman brought him nearly

everything that, since his youth, had made up his picture of a successful love affair.

"In his idea of pleasure I had always been able to distinguish several elements that surprised me, because they did not seem to go together. He needed:

"1. To feel his mistress was in some respect his superior, giving up something—social position or wealth—to come to him.

"2. He wanted her chaste and wished her to show a reserve in her pleasures which he, Lecadieu, would have to overcome. That was because he was fundamentally, I believe, more vainglorious than sensual.

"Now Thérèse Trélivan represented almost exactly the type of woman whom he had so often described to me. He liked her house, the elegant room in which she received him, her dresses and even her footmen. Above all he felt a sensation of extreme pleasure, that bound him very closely to her, when she admitted for how long a time she had been in awe of him.

" 'Don't you think that extraordinary?' he said to me. 'One thinks oneself despised, neglected, one finds a thousand reasons, all

of them excellent, to explain a woman's disdain. Suddenly, when one is taken behind the scenes, one finds out that she had gone through the same fears at the same times. Don't you remember, I said to you: "She has not come for three lessons: she must certainly be tired of me"? At that moment she was thinking (she told me so): "My presence must irritate him: I won't come for three lessons." This complete knowledge of another mind, which one had been disposed to think hostile, is perhaps, my dear fellow, my greatest pleasure in love. It is perfect peace at last, and the most delicious relief to one's vanity. I think, Renaud, I am going to fall in love with her.'

"I was naturally cold-blooded and I remembered our conversation with old Lefort.

" 'But is she intelligent?' I asked.

" 'Intelligent?' he said warmly; 'what does intelligent mean? You can see mathematicians at the school—Lefévre for instance—that the specialists think marvellously intelligent, but whom you and I would call dolts. If I try to explain to Thérèse the philosophy of Spinoza (I *have* tried it) I obviously bore

her, although she displays a great deal of patience and attention, but on many subjects it is she who overtakes and passes me. She knows more about the actual life of a certain section of French society in this latter part of the nineteenth century than you, or I, or Monsieur Renan. On the subject of political personalities, the world, or the influence of women I can listen to her for hours on end without being bored.'

"During the ensuing months Madame Trélivan showed the utmost readiness to satisfy her lover's curiosity. It was enough for Lecadieu to say, 'I should like to see Jules Ferry once. . . . Constant must be an odd fellow. . . . Do you know Maurice Barrés?' for her immediately to promise to arrange a meeting. She quickly discovered the value of Trélivan's innumerable acquaintanceships, that up till now had seemed so tedious and so tiresome. She found a lively pleasure in laying her husband's influence at the feet of her young lover.

" 'But Trélivan?' I said sometimes, when Lecadieu came back from one of those evenings of which he always brought me such

marvellous accounts. . . . 'All the same, how can he fail to notice the change in your position in the house?'

"Lecadieu became pensive.

" 'Yes,' he said, 'it is certainly odd.'

" 'Do you visit her at her house sometimes?'

" 'No; on account of the children, and to some extent of the servants. But as far as Trélivan is concerned he has never been known to be at home between three and seven. But what is astonishing is that she has twenty times asked for invitations for me, seats for the Chamber, and for the Senate, and he always agrees wih the utmost politeness and even cordiality, without asking for any explanation. When I dine at his house he treats me with marked consideration. He introduces me as "a talented young man from the École Normale." I think he has taken a liking to me.'

"One consequence of this new life was that Lecadieu did hardly any more work. Our Head-master, under the influence of the magic name of Trélivan had given up any control over his movements, but his masters com-

plained of him. He was too brilliant to be in any danger of failing in his final examination, but he was losing ground. I told him so and he merely laughed. The reading of thirty or forty difficult authors seemed to him a ridiculous occupation and quite beneath his notice. From this point of view Madame Trélivan had a bad effect on him. She had so often seen successful intrigues in her own circle that she had convinced Lecadieu that the ordinary methods were too slow.

" 'The Final?' he said. 'Oh, I shall pass it because I am here, but what drudgery it is! I suppose it amuses you to study the strings that are needed to work the old university puppets. It interests me slightly because I have a taste for all kinds of strings, but it is my opinion that, folly for folly, one is better advised to perform on another stage where the audience is larger. In the world as it is, power is in inverse ration to the expenditure of labour. Society gives the happiest life to its most useless members. A position in the great world, the favours of women, and even popular affection are at the disposal of a good speaker. You remember La Bruyère's

remark? "The influence of people of quality will set a man on his course and save him thirty years' labour." The "quality" to-day is the favour of certain men, ministers, heads of groups, prominent bureaucrats who are more powerful than Louis XIV or Napoleon ever were.'

"'But afterwards? You will go into politics?'

"'Why should I? No, I have no definite plan. I am the look-out. . . . I shall seize every opportunity. . . . There are a thousand careers outside politics which have equally a touch of the miraculous without being so risky. The politician always has to make the people like him—a difficult and mysterious affair. I should like to make the politicians like me, which is child's play and quite an amusing game. Many of them are cultivated and charming men; Trélivan talks about Aristophanes much better than our masters and with a sense of life that they are without. You have no conception of his unadulterated cynicism, his magnificent shamelessness.'

"After this, my laudations of professorial chairs in the provinces, with four hours of lec-

tures and leisure for study, must have seemed to him very flat.

"About this time I also heard from one of our school-fellows, whose father visited the Trélivan's, that Lecadieu was by no means generally liked. His feeling of equality with the greatest personages was too obvious. His Machiavellianism was transparent. He was not naturally respectful. People were surprised to see this youth, too tall for his age, this Danton-like mask, always by the side of the mistress of the house: he gave the impression of being nervous, and annoyed with himself for being so, strong and too conscious of his strength. 'Who is this Caliban who talks the language of Prospero?' Monsieur France had asked.

"Another disagreeable aspect of the adventure was that Lecadieu was now always in need of money. Dress played a part in his new scheme of life and on this point this brilliant intellect became almost childish. I listened to him talk to me for three whole evenings about a young under-secretary's double-breasted white waistcoat. He stopped in the street in front of bootmakers' shops and

studied the styles with great earnestness. Then as he noticed my silent and disapproving attitude:

" 'Well?' said he: 'out with it. I don't mind what you think.'

"The rooms of the pupils at the École Normale are like boxes in a theatre, closed by curtains, side by side along a corridor. Mine was on the right of Lecadieu's: on the left slept André Klein, now Deputy for the Landes.

"A few weeks before the examination I was wakened by a noise that seemed unusual, and as I sat up in bed I heard distinct sounds of sobbing. I got up: Klein, already alarmed, was watching in the corridor with his ear glued to the curtain in front of Lecadieu's room. The lamentations were coming from there.

"I had not seen my friend since the morning, but we had grown so accustomed to his absences that no one had paid any attention to the length of this one. After consulting me by a movement of the head, Klein drew back the curtain. Lecadieu, still dressed, was lying on his bed crying. Remember what I

have told you about his strength of character and our respect for him, and you can picture our surprise.

"'What is the matter?' I said to him. 'Lecadieu. . . . Answer me. What is the matter?'

"'Leave me alone: I am going away.'

"'Going away? What sort of nonsense is this?'

"'It isn't nonsene. I am forced to go.'

"'Are you mad? Have you been expelled?'

"'No. . . . I have promised to go away.'

"He shook his head and fell back on to the bed again.

"'You are absurd, Lecadieu,' said Klein.

"He sat up abruptly.

"'Come,' I said to him. 'What has happened? Please leave us, Klein.'

"We were alone. Lecadieu had recovered control of himself. He got up, went to the looking-glass, put his hair and necktie straight and came and sat down beside me.

"Now that I could see him better I was struck by the extraordinary alteration in his features. One would have said that his eyes

had been extinguished. I felt instinctively that some essential part of that fine machine had been broken.

" 'Madame Trélivan?' I asked.

"I thought she was dead.

" 'Yes,' he said, after a sigh, 'don't be impatient, I will tell you everything. . . . Yes, to-day, after my lesson Trélivan sent a footman to ask me to come to his study. He was working. He said to me, "Good-morning, my boy": quietly finished the paragraph and without another word handed me two of my letters. . . . (I had been foolish enough to write letters, not merely sentimental, but impossible to defend.) I stammered something or other—no doubt quite incoherent. I was unprepared: I was living as you know in utter security. He himself was perfectly calm: I had the sensation of being judged, summed up.

" 'When I had finished speaking, he flicked the ash from his cigarette (oh! that moment's silence, Renaud . . . in spite of everything I had the time to admire it, it was worthy of a great actor), and then began to talk to me about our position with astonishing imparti-

ality, detachment and clarity of judgment. I cannot give you an idea of what he said. Everything seemed clear and evident. He said: "You love my wife, you tell her so in a letter: she loves you too, and her feeling for you is, I believe, deep and sincere. You, of course, know what our life has been. Your affection for each other is not even guilty. Better still, I have, at the moment, personal reasons for wanting my liberty. I will place no obstacle in the way of your happiness. . . . The children? I have only sons, as you know. I will send them to school as boarders. . . . Holidays? Everything can be arranged with a little good-will and forbearance. They won't suffer at all—on the contrary. . . . Money? Thérèse has a modest competence of her own and you will earn your living. . . . I see only one hindrance, or rather only one difficulty: I am a public man and my divorce will make a certain stir. To reduce the scandal to a minimum, I must ask your help. I suggest you to a dignified and honourable way out. I do not wish my wife to stay in Paris and provide pabulum for the hawkers of gossip. I ask you to go away and take her with you. I

will inform your Head-master of the position and will get you an appointment in a college in the provinces. . . .” “But I have not yet got my degree.” “That is not essential. Don't worry: I have enough influence at the Ministry to get you a sixth-form mastership. Besides, there is nothing to prevent you continuing to prepare for your Final and taking the examination next year. I will then get you a better appointment. Above all don't think I am proposing to persecute you. Quite the contrary. You find yourself in a difficult, a painful, situation: I know it, my friend: I am sorry for you and I make allowances. I am thinking of your interests as well as mine in this business. If you accept my conditions, I will help you to get out of it. . . . If you refuse, then I shall be obliged to have recourse to legal weapons.” ’

“ ‘Legal weapons—what does that mean? What can he do to you?’

“ ‘Everything: he can bring a suit against me for adultery.’

“ ‘Nonsense! Sixteen francs fine? He would make himself utterly ridiculous.’

“ ‘Yes, but a man like him can close every

career to me. It would be folly to resist; and yet, in giving way . . . who knows?'

"'You have agreed?'

"'I am leaving with her in a week for the college at Luxeuil.'

"'And she does not mind?'

"'Oh, she is wonderful,' said Lecadieu. 'I have just been spending the evening with her. I said to her, "Aren't you afraid of life in a small town, so commonplace and so dull?" She replied, "I am going away with you: I did not listen to anything else."'

"Then I understood why Lecadieu made so little resistance. He was intoxicated by the idea of living in freedom with his mistress.

"At that time I was, like him, very young, and there was something so dramatic about the blow, that I accepted its fatal inevitability without thinking of discussing it. Later on, when I thought over these events in cold blood and with a certain knowledge of men, I understood that Trélivan had cleverly taken advantage of a boy's inexperience to clear up his own life with as little damage as possible. He had long been anxious to get rid of a wife

who bored him. We knew later that he had then made up his mind to marry Mademoiselle Marsay. He had known about the first lover, but had then been reluctant to let loose a scandal which, in view of his inevitable relations with the man, would have made his political life rather difficult.

"The practice of authority had taught him patience and he was waiting for the favourable moment. He could not have found a better one: a young man helpless in the face of his influence, his wife removed from Paris for a long while, if she followed her lover—and it was probable that she would do so, because she was young and in love with him: the public disturbance reduced to a minimum by the disappearance of the protagonists. He had realized that this was a safe game to play and he had won it without any trouble.

"A fortnight later Lecadieu had vanished from our life. He wrote sometimes; he did not appear for the Final examination that year, nor the following year. The commotion caused by his fate diminished and then subsided. I received formal notice of his marriage to Madame Trélivan, and I learnt

from some friends that he had got his degree, and thanks to 'certain political influences' had been appointed to the Lycée at B——, a much-coveted post: then I left the university and forgot Lecadieu.

"Last year, while on a journey, I happened to visit B——: I had the curiosity to go to the Lycée, which is housed in an ancient abbey, one of the most beautiful in France, and ask the porter what had become of Monsieur Lecadieu. The porter was an officious and grandiloquent gentleman who, on the strength of carrying about in a learned atmosphere the lists of the absent and detained, had acquired something of a pedantic manner.

" 'Monsieur Lecadieu,' he said . . . 'Monsieur Lecadieu has belonged to the staff of this college for more than twenty years, and we hope he will stay here until he retires. . . . However, if you want to see him, you have but to cross the main quadrangle, and go down the staircase on the left in the junior quadrangle. He will certainly be thereabouts talking to the matron.'

" 'But how is this? Isn't the school on holiday?'

" 'Yes, but Mademoiselle Septime undertook to take a few children during the daytime for certain families in the town. The Head-master gave his consent and Monsieur Lecadieu comes to keep her company.'

" 'Indeed; but Lecadieu is married, is he not?'

" 'He *was* married,' said my friend the porter, with a reproachful look and in a tragic voice. 'We buried Madame Lecadieu a year ago.'

" 'Why, of course,' I thought: 'she must have been nearly seventy. Their domestic life must have been very singular.'

"And I asked another question.

" 'She was much older than he was, was she not?'

" 'It was one of the most astonishing things, sir,' said he, 'that I have ever seen in this school. Madame Lecadieu became old all at once. When they first came she was—I am not exaggerating—a girl . . . fair, with a lovely pink complexion, well dressed and . . . full of high spirits. Perhaps you know who she had been?'

" 'Yes, yes, I know.'

" 'Well, then the wife of a Prime Minister in a provincial Lycée—you can naturally imagine. . . . She worried us a good deal at first. We are all friends here, sir. . . . The Head-master always says, "I want my school to be a happy family"; and when he goes into a class he never fails to say, "Monsieur Lecadieu (I mention his name as I would that of Monsieur Nebout or Monsieur Lecaplain), how is your wife to-day?" But, as I told you, at first Madame Lecadieu would not know anybody, she paid no visits and would not even return them. Many of the gentlemen began to give the husband the cold shoulder, and you can't blame them. Fortunately Monsieur Lecadieu is a man of the world and put matters right with the ladies. He knows how to make himself pleasant. Nowadays, when he gives a lecture in the town, all the aristocracy are there, lawyers, manufacturers, prefect and everybody. . . . And then they all settled down: even his wife got used to it, and later on no one here was more popular or more friendly than Madame Lecadieu. But she had grown old, old. . . . It was cancer that carried her off.'

"'Indeed?' said I. 'If you will allow me I will go and try to find Monsieur Lecadieu.'

"I crossed the main quadrangle. It was an old cloister of the fifteenth century, somewhat defaced by numerous windows through which could be seen benches and cracked tables. On the left a vaulted staircase led down to a smaller quadrangle enclosed by some bleak-looking trees. At the foot of this staircase two persons were standing, a man with his back towards me, and a tall woman with a bony face and coarse hair, whose check flannel bodice was supported in a rigid circle by the ramparts of her old-fashioned corsets. The pair appeared to be engaged in an animated conversation. The vaulted passage acted as a sort of speaking-tube, and brought to my ears a voice that called up with extraordinary vividness the dormitory landing at the École Normale; and this is what I heard:

"'Yes, Corneille is perhaps more powerful, but Racine is sweeter and more delicate. La Bruyère said very cleverly that the former depicts men as they are: the latter as they ought to be.'

"To listen to the utterance of such plati-

tudes, and to such a companion, and to think they came from a man who had received my first confidences, and who had been the strongest influence that I had encountered in my youth, seemed so strange to me, and above all so painful, that I took two brisk steps in the vaulted passage so as to get a better view of the speaker, hoping that I was mistaken. He turned his head and revealed attributes that I had not looked for: a beard beginning to grow grey, and a bald head. But it was certainly Lecadieu. He too recognized me at once, and a vague expression of annoyance and almost of pain came over his face, but quickly gave place to a friendly, though still slightly troubled and awkward, smile.

"I was a good deal upset, and as I did not want to talk about the past in front of that grotesque female, I hurriedly invited my friend to lunch and arranged to meet him at midday at a restaurant which he mentioned.

"In front of the Lycée at B—— there is a little open square planted with chestnut trees: I stayed there for some time. 'Upon what,' I said to myself, 'does the success or failure of a life depend? Here is Lecadieu, who

was intended for a great man, translating the same exercises every year with successive generations of school-boys of Touraine, and spending his holidays paying pedantic attentions to that ludicrous monstrosity, whereas Klein, who is extremely intelligent but, none the less, has no genius, manages to realize in actual life the dream of Lecadieu's youth. Why is this?' ('I must ask Klein,' I thought to myself, 'to get Lecadieu a post in Paris.')

"And as I made my way towards St. Etienne in B——, a fine Romanesque church that I wanted to see again, I tried to imagine what had been the cause of this collapse. At the beginning there could not have been any change: it was the same man, the same brain. Trélivan must have inexorably confined them to the provinces. He kept his promises and got them rapid promotion, but forbade them Paris. . . . The provinces are marvellously well suited to certain temperaments. I have been very happy there myself. In the old days at Rouen I had masters whose acceptance of provincial life had endued them with a wonderful serenity, a judgment pure and untainted by the errors of the day. But a Leca-

dieu needs Paris. In exile his lust for power makes him pursue common-place successes. . . . It would indeed be a terrible test of character to try and lead the life of the intellect at B——. Politics, perhaps? Very difficult when one does not come from the neighbourhood. In any case it is a laborious process. You are faced with claims already established, the force of tradition and a kind of hierarchy of interests. For a temperament like his, discouragement must have come very quickly. . . . A man by himself can still get out of his surroundings and work, but Lecadieu had a wife with him. After her first months of happiness she must have regretted her life in society. One can imagine the gradual weakening. . . . Then she begins to grow old. . . . He is sensual. . . . There are young girls; lectures on literature. . . . Madame Trélivan becomes jealous. . . . Life is nothing more than a succession of stupid and exhausting quarrels. Then illness, the desire to forget, force of habit too, the astonishing relativity of one's ambitions, gratifications to his pride which he would have thought ridiculous at twenty (the Municipal

Council and the conquest of the matron). . . . And yet, my Lecadieu, the youthful genius, could not have entirely disappeared: there must be considerable deposits of it still in his mind, beneath the surface perhaps, but which it might be possible to get at and uncover.

"When I got to the restaurant, after having seen the Cathedral, Lecadieu was already there and was engaged in a pedantic and waggish conversation with the proprietress, a short fat woman with black curling-pins; what I heard made me feel quite ill and I hurriedly led him towards a table.

"You are familiar with the uneasy volubility of men who dread a painful allusion. As soon as the conversation looks like approaching the subjects that were 'taboo,' a false animation betrays their anxiety, and their remarks become like those empty trains that are sent backwards and forwards in weak sections of the line to avert an anticipated attack. During the entire meal, my friend Lecadieu talked continuously with a facile flowing eloquence, banal almost to absurdity, about B——, his school, the cli-

mate, the municipal elections, and the intrigues of the women teachers.

" 'There is a little blonde, my boy, in the tenth preparatory form . . .'

"The only thing that would have interested me would have been to find out how this vast ambition had been renounced, how that stubborn will had capitulated, in a word, what his inner life had been like since the day he left the École Normale. But every time I tried to lead him in this direction he darkened the surrounding atmosphere with a flood of empty and confused verbiage. I recognized once more the "extinct" look in the eyes that had so much struck me on the day when Trélivan had discovered his intrigue.

"When the cheese was brought I lost my temper, and all sense of decency, and, without taking my eyes off him, I said sharply:

" 'What game are you playing, Lecadieu? You used to be intelligent. Why are you talking like an anthology of elegant extracts? Why are you afraid of me, and of yourself?'

"He got very red. A sharp flash of will, perhaps of anger, appeared in his eyes, and for a few seconds I found my Lecadieu again,

my Julien Sorel, my Rastignac of my school-days. But the official mask immediately descended once more over the broad, bearded features and he said with a smile:

" 'What? Intelligent? What do you mean? You were always an odd fellow.'

"And then he talked about his Headmaster. Yes, M. de Balzac's work was complete."

The Third Circle of Mape
or
The Interpreter

The Portrait of an Actress

THE PORTRAIT OF AN ACTRESS

I

ABOUT the middle of the eighteenth century the bands of strolling actors who wandered about the English countryside, playing Shakespeare in tavern yards or on the hard earthen floors of barns, led for the most part wretched and degrading lives. The Puritans, who were still numerous, put up notices outside their villages:

"No monkeys, marionettes, or actors."

No doubt, like the great Popish Bishop, they objected to the stage for presenting the passions under too attractive a disguise.

But after all a man's calling is but an accident and true dignity can hardly be lessened by circumstances beyond his control. Although Mr. Roger Kemble was merely the humble manager of one of these bands of vagrant actors, he had the serene and stately bearing, the cold ease of manner, of a Lord Chancellor. The dignity of his countenance

was indeed unique. The eyes were extremely vivid, and the brows above them exquisitely arched: the mouth was small and admirably modelled, and the nose was excellent. Its line was faultlessly straight, so that the majestic harmony of the features was untroubled, while, by a most unusual though highly successful combination of styles, the tip of it, very slightly too long and too fleshy, added something powerful and personal to the cast of his countenance. It was the nose of his clan, ancestral and penetrating, and the friends of the Kembles, as they looked at it, liked to think that it symbolized the fortunes of the family.

Mrs. Kemble, like her husband, was extremely handsome and of a commanding presence. Her voice, strong and sweet, seemed made for tragedy. She herself had been created by a provident Demiurge to play Roman Mothers and the Queens of Shakespeare. When, one evening, she gave birth to a daughter after a performance of *Henry VIII,* a drama which concludes, as may be remembered, with the birth of Elizabeth, the entire company felt that a princess had just

been born. In their private life as on the stage there was something regal about the Kembles.

Their daughter Sarah inherited the good looks of her parents and they brought her up with a wise severity. Her mother taught her to read, repeating each syllable aloud, and she learnt the Bible by heart. In the evening they tried her with small parts such as Ariel in the *Tempest,* and she was told to knock the candle-snuffers on the chandelier to imitate, as the scene might demand, the noises of a mill or of a storm. In the morning the passers-by observed through the windows of an inn a lovely childish face buried in the pages of a great book: it was *Paradise Lost.* The sombre descriptions of the great Puritan, his vast lyrical landscapes delighted a mind that was fundamentally religious and by its very nature drawn to the sublime. As she read and re-read the passage in which Satan, on the shore of a flaming ocean, summons his infernal legions, she felt an affectionate pity for that magnificent doomed angel.

Mr. and Mrs. Kemble were determined that their children should not become actors.

They had a natural, almost painful, leaning towards respectability and they were distressed by the contempt with which so many people looked upon their calling. Moreover, Mr. Kemble, who was a Catholic, had sent his son John to France, to the Seminary at Douai, to have him educated for the priesthood. As for Sarah, he hoped that her beauty would enable her to escape the stage through a rich marriage.

When she was sixteen and her shoulders had not lost their youthful angularities, the son of a rich landowner who had heard her sing did in fact fall in love with her and asked her hand in marriage. Mr. Kemble welcomed with satisfaction a proposal which fell in so exactly with his wishes, and his daughter displayed no objection to the attentions of the suitor, encouraged as they were by her father. Mr. Siddons, the leading junior of the company, appeared to be upset by the affair.

He had no histrionic ability, and like all actors and the great majority of men, considered himself indispensable. He had the necessary and natural conceit of his profession: he watched with increasing admiration

a sensible and virtuous creature growing up in his company, and under the cover of the labours that they shared paid respectful addresses to Sarah Kemble.

When he saw himself in danger of losing her he summoned up courage to ask for an interview with his manager and made known his feelings. Mr. Kemble replied with a truly royal haughtiness that his daughter would never marry an actor, and to avoid any risks discharged the rash admirer. But, being an upright man, and quite properly preferring the customs of the profession to his own personal apprehensions, he offered to give a benefit performance for the discomfited lover before his departure.

This gave rise to a distressing incident. At the end of the performance, Siddons asked to be allowed to go back on to the stage to take farewell of the public. He produced a manuscript from his pocket and began to read some occasional verses that he had composed in order to inform the audience of the cruel conclusion of his courtship. In small towns the emotions are always lively for want of exercise and the applause was vigorous.

When the actor went back into the wings Mr. Siddons received from the fine strong hand of Mrs. Kemble two sound boxes on the ear. She despised with all her heart a young man who was a poor actor and spoke his lines badly.

Up to this point Sarah Kemble had remained an apparently impartial spectator of a contest of which she was the subject. She was all too young to feel deeply. But the whole theatrical tradition disposed her in favour of an ill-used lover. Touched by such harsh treatment and perhaps a little ashamed of her parents' conduct, she swore that she would marry no one but the victim. Her father tried the expedient of getting her away from the stage for a time and obtained for her a place as reader in a neighbouring family. Then he reflected that she was a Kemble. Together with her divine and regular loveliness, she had the nose, the wilful strong nose, of the family. He dreaded a secret marriage.

"I had forbidden you," he said to her, "to marry an actor. You are not disobeying me, for you are marrying a man whom the Devil himself could not turn into an actor."

II

A YEAR later the name of Mrs. Siddons was already not quite unknown in the southern counties in England. So finished a beauty was rare in travelling companies. Her austere demeanour and her impenetrable virtue added respect to admiration. Those who had been in her company would tell of her industrious life. She spent the morning in washing or ironing, in preparing her husband's meals and in looking after the child that had been born. In the afternoon she learned her new parts. In the evening she acted, and when she came back after the theatre she often finished her laundry-work.

This combination of middle-class virtues and poetic talent gave extreme pleasure to the English public. At that time it was the custom in small towns for the actors to go from house to house and humbly beg the in-

habitants to come to their performance. Mrs. Siddons always received an enthusiastic welcome.

"An actress with your talent," so the old amateurs would tell her, "ought not to be trailing about the provinces."

Such was also the assured opinion of the lovely Sarah herself, who in spite of her youth felt that she was completely mistress of her art. "All parts are easy," she would say: "it is merely a matter of memory." Yet one evening when she had studied for the first time the part of Lady Macbeth she went up to her room thoughtful and shaken. The character seemed to her incomprehensibly wicked. She felt herself so little capable of doing harm. She loved her husband with the slightly condescending affection of a manager's daughter and a more accomplished artist. She adored her child. She loved God, her relations, her companions, the lovely English villages with their neatly trimmed thatched roofs. She loved her work, her profession, the boards of the stage. Her Lady Macbeth was an idyll.

One evening, at a small theatre in a water-

ing-place, a very fashionable lady, the Honourable Miss Boyle, discovered the Siddons company and was delighted with the young actress. She called upon her, gave her advice and presented her with dresses. As she was leaving she told Mr. Siddons that his wife ought to be in London, and promised to mention her to Garrick himself, who, as actor and manager, wielded a well-deserved and sovereign power in the world of the theatre. Mr. Siddons was delighted to hear such praises of his wife from a person of quality whose rank was a guarantee of good taste. He repeated the compliment to the young actress, who had rather gloomily gone back to her dressmaking. "There you are," she murmured, "everyone says so. I ought to be in London."

"Yes," replied Siddons thoughtfully, "we ought to be in London."

For a few weeks she looked for the arrival of the great Garrick himself, who would have taken her by the hand, carried her off in his carriage and offered her the finest parts. Nothing came. Doubtless Miss Boyle's promises, like so many of the promises of

persons of quality, had been no more than casual politeness.

"Besides," she reflected in her disappointment, "even if Miss Boyle did speak to Garrick, all powerful as he is, an actress, more or less, can be of no great importance to him."

Thus it is that youth, which always passes from undue confidence to undue scepticism, thinks at one moment that the springs of the world move as quickly as its own desires, or again that they do not move at all. The truth is that they move with a slow and mysterious persistence and that the effects of their movement only become apparent when we have forgotten that they have been released. Miss Boyle had spoken to Garrick, and Garrick had listened to her with the greatest interest. He had some first-rate actresses in his company, but they were as trying as they were capable and, as they gradually became unmanageable, he was thinking about establishing a reserve of young women ready to replace the old guard if it mutinied.

A few months later a special emissary met Mrs. Siddons at Liverpool and engaged her

for a season. She had to wait for the birth of a daughter before she could leave, and then, as soon as she was able to travel, the family took the coach for London. Rocked by the jolts of the journey the lovely young woman soon fell into a pleasing reverie. She was twenty years old and she was going to make her first appearance on the most important English stage with the greatest actor of all time. Her happiness was complete.

Drury Lane Theatre, where the famous Garrick held sway, was quite unlike those with which Mrs. Siddons had been acquainted hitherto. There was a breath of religion in the atmosphere of the place. Garrick kept himself aloof from his company and treated them with a careful and haughty courtesy. In the corridors, where conversation was carried on in an undertone, Dr. Johnson might be seen going by and the actresses would drop him a curtsey. Mrs. Siddons had every reason to be pleased with her reception by the Master. He thought her enchanting and told her so: he asked her which were her favourite parts and invited her to recite a

scene. She chose Rosalind: and her husband took the other part.

"Love is merely a madness, and I tell you deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do . . . and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel."

And so the lovely Sarah went on. "The Devil," thought Garrick. "Those idiots have done a bad day's work for me. Why, the least of my actresses, twenty years older and much less pretty . . . Rosalind, indeed! One lover at least will be needed. Really it is all very trying."

He thanked her amiably and advised her to play Portia in the *Merchant of Venice,* an unemotional part whose pure eloquence might suit her youthful inexperience.

The following evening, when he was playing King Lear, he offered her his own box and asked her to come and see him after the performance to amuse himself with her impressions. In spite of thirty years of fame

and flattery, the amazement and admiration of those who saw him for the first time was a sight that had never yet wearied him. Once again he could be satisfied. Mrs. Siddons was literally stupefied. At the moment when the Old King, disordered and terrible, had pronounced his curse, she observed the frightened audience bend backwards with a single movement like corn beneath the wind.

It was with something of a shock that she met in the wings this graceful and active little man who had just been impersonating Sorrow. Delighted with this dumb bewilderment he was very ready to give her a lavish display of his accomplishments. The mobility of his countenance was unbelievable. He could mould his features as if they had been a mass of dough. It was said that when Hogarth had not been able to finish the portrait of Fielding before his end, Garrick, after a little practice, went and posed as the dead man to the entire satisfaction of the painter. He suddenly presented to the admiring circle, of which Mrs. Siddons was the centre, Macbeth coming out of Duncan's room after the

murder, then, in an instant, he became a little pastry-cook walking along whistling with a basket on his head: then he drew himself up in such a way that his audience seemed to see before them the ghost of the old King rising among the mists of Elsinore.

"What?" said Siddons, quite overcome, "without scenery, and with no one else. . ."

"My friend," said the great little man, "if you cannot pay your addresses to a table just as well as to the loveliest young woman in the world, you will never make an actor."

On that evening Mrs. Siddons realized for the first time that perhaps she herself was not yet an actress. The rehearsals made her really uneasy. Garrick insisted that the minutest gestures and the slightest changes of tone should be thought out beforehand. Many of the actors made notes on the characters they were to represent. The Master touched up his own parts at every performance just as a great painter cannot look at his pictures without putting in another stroke or two. His Macbeth, at once bold and dejected, was a masterpiece of fine shades. Mrs. Siddons was not suited to this

kind of work and was not capable of doing it. However, remembering her successes on tour, complimented on her beauty by everyone, she gallantly maintained her confidence.

At last a performance of the *Merchant of Venice* was announced, "for the first appearance of an unknown actress." The audience observed the entrance of an extremely pallid Portia, wearing an old-fashioned salmon-coloured dress, so tremulous that she could hardly walk. At the beginning of her speeches her voice was very high and discordant. At the end of each sentence it sank into something like a whisper.

Next day the notices in the newspapers were severe. Mr. Siddons read them pitilessly to his wife. The unlucky actor laid stress on all the points made against his household rival. But Mrs. Siddons refused to recognize the seriousness of the reverse. Her enthusiasm and her confidence had been such that she would not let them be shaken. She watched her audiences anxiously for an expression of even the slightest appreciation which many might have been disposed to accord to so lovely a creature. But her per-

formance was too deplorable, and they turned their eyes away.

At the end of the season her engagement was not renewed. Garrick, when bidding her farewell, told her not to lose courage. "Mind your arms," he added; "in tragedy, a gesture should always start from the elbow."

III

"Damn braces, bliss relaxes."

MRS. SIDDONS had spent only six months in London, but she left it entirely changed. She was careless and proud when she came; she departed ambitious and humiliated. She could not help feeling vindictive towards her lovely and jealous rivals. When in the company of her closest friends she would relate how, with the unconscious collusion of Garrick, the three queens of Drury Lane had tried to smother her talent. Her self-respect found relief in providing her admirers with excuses which could not satisfy herself. At the bottom of her heart she knew that her defeat was deserved. Chosen spirits need only to see perfection to recognize it. Mrs. Siddons had admired in those women that she detested their knowledge of the stage, their elegance

of manner, their genius for dress. She knew that she had to build the edifice from its foundations, and she said to herself, "I will do it."

Decisive as her defeat had been, she had escaped the slavery of the beaten earthen floors of village barns. A defeat at Drury Lane became a title to fame at Manchester. Mrs. Siddons met with a warm reception in the large provincial theatres. Even her husband himself was able to appear in parts befitting the talents which heaven had not too lavishly bestowed upon him.

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Siddons's brother, John Kemble, came to join them. He had run away from the Seminary at Douai, feeling too much of an actor to be fitted for the priesthood. His masters had reawakened his hereditary tastes by making him read during meals the lives of the Saints in that splendid Kemble voice of his. When he noticed that in church he could not listen to a great preacher without, quite unconsciously, saying to himself, "What a part," he realised once and for all that his vocation lay elsewhere. He

brought back with him from his stay at the Seminary a knowledge of Latin, of ancient and ecclesiastical history, and the manners of a man of the world.

Mrs. Siddons found it both pleasant and profitable to go over her parts with him. He taught her history as they went along. The written words began to take on a new life against a series of vivid and romantic backgrounds. She was astonished to find fresh and valuable materials in her feelings and her recollections. It was becoming easy to construct a Lady Macbeth out of defeated aspirations, a mild contempt for the feeble Siddons, and an absorbing and powerful affection for her brother. It seemed as though the great shades of tragedy, like those in the land of the Cimmerians, had regained their strength and speech by drinking the dark blood of sacrifices.

Success, always a loyal comrade, faithfully accompanied the actress in her advancement. A tradition began to grow up about her in the towns which she visited on tour. It was reported how she took all her lovely

children about with her. Out of an extreme regard for decency, although her legs were perfect, she insisted on wearing a large cloak when playing male parts. The public liked to find such angelic beauty accompanied by such purity of mind. The pleasures of the play-going public were in some way sanctified by the domestic virtues of the actress, and the ecclesiastical intonations which John's voice still retained completed this comforting and pleasing ambiguity.

Their studious and simple existence was enlivened by a thousand diverting adventures. In many of the towns friends impatiently awaited their arrival. There were picturesque inns like the Black Bear at Devizes, where Lawrence, the landlord, welcomed his customers with a copy of Shakespeare under his arm, and before showing them their rooms offered to read poetry to them, or get his ten-year-old son Thomas, who could catch a likeness excellently, to make a drawing of their profiles. Mrs. Siddons was always glad to see the handsome boy who had made several admirable pencil drawings of her, and little Lawrence would often ask his father when the

"most beautiful of all the ladies" was coming again.

Mrs. Siddons's success soon became such that she was engaged to act at Bath. It was the time when that delightful watering-place was frequented by all that was most distinguished in English society.

Under Corinthian colonnades round the fine open spaces of the city, local reputations were made which the rank and fashion of the company soon spread abroad throughout the country. For the first few days Mrs. Siddons was afraid of a repetition of what had happened in London. The important comedy parts belonged to the actresses already installed in the theatre, and tragedy, which was played on Thursdays to empty houses, as it was the custom on that day to go to the Cotillion Ball, was left to her.

But a few weeks later an event occurred which in the quiet history of Bath was like the advent of a new government in London: a fashion changed. It became the mode on Thursdays to go and see Mrs. Siddons play

in Shakespeare. About the same time it became the correct thing to commission a portrait of the beloved from the young painter Thomas Lawrence, who had also come to Bath to seek fame and fortune.

His good looks and his talents had steadily increased. At twelve years old he had all the attractions and all the failings of precocity. His skill as a draughtsman and his capacity as a colourist were something like miraculous. This youth, whom all the city was pleased to pamper and admire, was himself an admirer of Mrs. Siddons. A feeling of confused and affectionate regard brought him to the house in the day-time and in the evening to the young actress's box. Among the countless feminine faces whose contours he had traced with his delicate firm line, hers was the only one that really pleased him. He loved more than anything in the world a certain delicacy of form, a lustre in the eyes, and a purity of contour which he found in her and her only. Mrs. Siddons was more beautiful than ever: her figure, which had once been a little frail, had filled out into soft rounded curves. He was never tired of looking at her in an amazed

and delighted ecstasy. He liked to wander about the theatre among her dresses and to breathe the air laden with her perfume; and Mrs. Siddons, so little of a coquette, indulged herself with the maternal and protective coquetry of letting this child of genius live in the radiance of her beauty.

She spent some delightful years at Bath. She had made distinguished friends who were devotedly attached to her and watched her exertions with understanding. Her daughters were growing up and promised to be as lovely as their mother. Mr. Siddons had given up acting, but had undertaken the direction of his wife's talents, whose display, when among friends and behind closed doors, he sometimes criticized with a singular combination of interested admiration and penetrating bitterness.

But fame has its obligations, and London called her back. Her concern for the future of her family did not admit of her rejecting offers that were more than flattering. There were moving scenes at her farewell performance. She had to come back on to the stage surrounded by her children. It was an affect-

ing and somewhat solemn ceremony, quite in the character of the central figure. Young Lawrence, among others, was grieved at her departure, and made up his mind to go to London as soon as possible.

IV

ALTHOUGH she returned in circumstances quite different from those of her first appearance, Drury Lane frightened Mrs. Siddons. She wondered whether her voice could fill the vast hall, and regretted having left a town in which she was popular with everyone. As the date of her first performance approached, the more uneasy she began to feel. When the day arrived she prayed for a long time before going to the theatre. She insisted on her aged father, who had come specially up from the country, going with her to her room. She dressed in so utter a silence, with such tragic calmness, that she frightened her dressers.

As soon as the first act was over the applause and the tears of the audience reassured her. The men admired her large velvet eyes, her long, dark, deeply curved

eyebrows, the perfect modelling of the cheeks and chin, and the splendid rounded lines of her bosom. "This," said one of them, "is the noblest specimen of the human race that I have ever seen." Her finished acting caused no less astonishment. The entire audience was overcome by a kind of affectionate enthusiasm. It was one of those magical evenings when all low and common thoughts are for a few hours banished from the soul by the pure pleasure of admiration.

She returned home utterly exhausted. Such was her joy and gratitude that she could not speak or even shed tears. She gave thanks to God and then shared a simple supper with her old father and her husband. The silence was almost unbroken. From time to time Mr. Siddons uttered a hoarse ejaculation of satisfaction: or Mr. Kemble, laying down his fork and, with a magnificently professional gesture, throwing back his white hair, clasped his hands and prayed. Mrs. Siddons, after an hour of meditation and thankfulness, fell into a pleasant and profound slumber that lasted until midday.

The succeeding performances convinced the

connoisseurs that the new actress was now in possession of all the resources of her art.

It became the fashion, as at Bath, to go and see the young tragedy queen and shed tears during the performance. Eyes that had not wept for forty years were suddenly able to shed veritable tears as soon as the fashion had been established. The King and Queen came to preside and weep over the tragical pleasures of their subjects: the Opposition wept in the stalls: Sheridan the sceptic could be seen wiping his eyes, and even the staff of the theatre themselves shared in the emotion. Two old actors said to each other: "Am I as pale as you are, my dear fellow?" Dry eyes were looked upon with much contempt.

The fashionable world was naturally extremely interested and wished to see at closer quarters someone who had suddenly taken so large a place in their lives. She refused their invitations, for her only pleasures were the study of her parts and her home life. If she happened to yield, she watched their drawing-rooms filling up with a multitude of unknown persons who crowded round the

couch on which she was sitting, nearly always silent and in an attitude of reflection.

The Royal Family gave her a warm welcome. That notorious libertine, the Prince of Wales, treated her with respect. It was impossible to look at her without realizing that the passions could make no impression on a soul so absolutely self-possessed. "Mrs. Siddons?" said a certain rake: "I would as soon talk about love to the Archbishop of Canterbury." This was indeed a subject that she never thought about. Although she had become accustomed to keeping Mr. Siddons outside her emotional life, she had never felt the need of replacing him. Apart from the stage and her parts it seemed as if the only two subjects in which she was interested were her children and her food. It was with accents of the deepest feeling that she spoke of the brown bread of Langford, and of a certain variety of ham which could only be got in Bath. When the Provost of Edinburgh, upon the occasion of a dinner given in her honour during a triumphant tour, asked her if she did not find the beef too salt, she

answered in her most tragic voice, "Never too salt for me, my Lord." She addressed the following improvised line in tones worthy of Lady Macbeth, to the footman in attendance:

"You bring me water, boy, I asked for beer."

Her enemies did not fail to make capital out of this gravity in everyday affairs which had become so natural to her. Mr. Siddons was very ready to quote an impertinent couplet:

"Still as her beauty every eye doth capture,
Some touch of awe is mingled with our rapture."

Mr. Siddons was unfair. His wife showed herself capable of real and sincere affection for the friends that she had chosen. During the succeeding years, as her success continued to increase, she gathered round her all that was best in the England of her time. Reynolds the painter, men like Burke and Fox, the formidable Dr. Johnson himself, liked her for her hard business head and respected her for the dignity of her life. If anyone showed amusement at the majestic coldness of their friend, "that," they would say, "is because

she keeps all the strength of her feelings for her art."

Which was only half correct. The mother counted far more than the actress. Her affection for her children, without being either noisy or sentimental, was the chief guiding thread of her life. She would have sacrificed everything to it.

Thanks to her, her daughters Sally and Maria had the happiest of childhoods. They felt themselves surrounded by an all-powerful prestige which they accepted without understanding it. Actors, men of letters, and princes brought them presents. Among the most welcome visitors was young Thomas Lawrence, who had left Bath for London.

He had grown extremely handsome. The beautiful women who sat for him loved to watch the long brown curls falling over his perfect features. They liked the mysterious tone in which he would talk of trifling matters; it gave his conversation an air of mystery and intimacy which intrigued them. He was very courteous and made them the most charming compliments in the world on their beauty: he had many adventures, made a

great deal of money and spent rather more. He found in the wise, virtuous and pious Mrs. Siddons an indulgence that knew no limits. Perhaps she still felt an unconscious gratitude for that delightful and discreet devotion to her beauty that he had never failed to show. Sometimes, when she was looking at him, or listening to what was being said about him, she thought of the beautiful fallen angel of Milton whom she had found so wonderful in her childhood.

The men were less kind. Many of them criticized his elaborate manners whose excessive correctness betrayed the parvenu. His perpetual smile, which seemed almost enamelled on his features, irritated the English upper class, always a little reserved.

"He can never be a gentleman," they said, "for more than three consecutive hours." The polished perfection of his portraits seemed to reveal the same characteristics.

Just as young girls, grown beautiful too early and courted before their feelings are awake, turn into bored and dangerous coquettes, the infant prodigy spends his life coquetting with his art. He has every

method of expression at his fingers' ends before he has anything to express. The contrast of his youth and his accomplishment amuses the public and they insist on a continual display of merely formal cleverness. The boy-artist, absorbed in a too productive activity, does not serve his apprenticeship to life. He soon reaches an utterly empty dexterity. His character suffers from it. The ease of his successes does not give his passions time to reach the depths of his soul, and a savage pride spreads into those secret places which should be the abode of the passions alone.

At that time Lawrence was too young for such far-reaching effects to be observable. Yet when delighted women praised the charm of his pastels, a few carping old connoisseurs would mutter: "He only paints the surface."

He passed nearly all his leisure time in the Siddons' house, and was the favourite companion of the two little daughters. He told them stories and made sketches for them. His extreme courtesy flattered their girlish pride. "Really," thought they, "there is nobody in the world like Mr. Lawrence."

In 1790, on the advice of John Kemble, who had retained agreeable memories of his French education, Sally and Maria were sent to Calais to finish their studies. A few pessimists were saying at the time that France was in a state of revolution, but Mrs. Siddons's diplomatic friends assured her that these manifestations were of no importance.

V

WHEN the first heads had fallen and a few English people who were more particularly well-informed about affairs abroad said that these absurd commotions in France threatened bloodshed, Mr. and Mrs. Siddons crossed the Straits and brought their daughters home. While Paris was moving along the inexorable curve from Mirabeau to Robespierre, these children had grown up into women.

Sally, at the age of eighteen, had inherited all her mother's beauty, her regular features, her Kemble nose, her velvety brown eyes and that unique expression of strength and sweetness which made Mrs. Siddons so irresistible. Maria had only the awkward wild charm of her fourteen years, but the loveliest eyes, vivacious beyond all belief. Both of them were delicate, and this was a source of anxiety to their mother, as diseases of the

lungs were not uncommon in her husband's family.

They found the house crowded as ever with princes and artists: Lawrence came to see his friends every evening. Sally's beauty completely carried him away. He found in it once more that unique perfection of line and modelling to which he was so susceptible, and which had so attracted him to Mrs. Siddons when she was twenty. He spent entire evenings in the enraptured contemplation of her. She herself felt all the old admiration for him revive once more, and when he asked her to marry him she gladly accepted. She was a straightforward child, serious and good, and she would not have approved of the comedies of hesitation sometimes favoured by the more ordinary type of young women just entering upon society.

Mrs. Siddons, who was the friend and confidante of her children, was informed on the following day of Lawrence's proposal and Sally's answer. She could not but feel a natural anxiety. She had known Lawrence for ten years, and knew how changeable and

violent his character had become. Men of talent are treated with the indulgence that is accorded to despotic rulers: their caprices are tolerated: the law has little force against their vagaries; and their wives and their mistresses need an heroic resignation. Lawrence's perpetual smile concealed an egotistical and selfish soul.

But Mrs. Siddons had so high an opinion of her daughter's character that she thought her capable of controlling even so difficult a personage as this. For Sally's profound seriousness of disposition was combined with the most delightful gaiety. She was quite perfect, and as her mother watched her ways she thought of some of Shakespeare's women, fascinating, childlike, and serious. So she gave a general consent to the marriage, but, having regard to Sally's extreme youth and wishing at the same time to test the constancy of Lawrence's feelings, she insisted that the engagement should be a long one, and that for a certain time it should not be made known to Mr. Siddons. She had become accustomed to protect the lives of her daughters, like her own, from her husband's

rather fatuous criticisms. Thanks to Mrs. Siddons's support the engaged pair were able to meet freely. They took long walks together in the London parks and gardens. Sometimes Sally would go to Lawrence's studio, and he took the greatest pleasure in using her as model for innumerable sketches.

Maria, who had until then spent all her time in her sister's company, was thus often left alone. She observed Sally's happiness with a certain confusion of mind. She was more alive than anyone to the pure and artless beauty of her sister's character, and she loved her deeply, but she could not help envying her the conquest of one whom they had both of them regarded since their childhood as without a rival. In a few months she had altered in the most astonishing manner: beside the divine perfection of her mother and her sister, she could still excite admiration by a touch of wildness and of passion, in which these two women were perhaps deficient.

There is something deeply fascinating to a young girl in the development of her own beauty. She suddenly steps out of the dark helplessness of childhood into the conscious-

ness of a power that has no limits. In her presence the strongest men are shaken. She knows that a word from her, a gesture, will turn them pale. As soon as Maria had tasted the delights of this experience she knew that she would never be able to resist them. Unlike her sister she had no strong moral or religious force to restrain her. She thought little: her movements were those of a playful and mischievous young animal. When her mother wanted to talk to her about serious and solemn subjects she turned the matter aside with a caress: she was light and charming, but self-sacrifice was beyond her strength.

How greatly she was tempted to try her power on Mr. Lawrence himself! She thought she could divine, by hardly perceptible indications, that it would not have taken him long to recognize this power. Sally had been unwise enough to make too clear how much she loved this dreadful personage who could not endure the absence of opposition. The kisses that she allowed him had become a habit and already began to weary him. The artist in him, the passionate admirer of femi-

nine beauty, took the intensest pleasure in watching the features of the girl trying by faint, hardly noticeable movements to break through the features of the child. He wished he could record this mobile and delicate grace upon a canvas. He said sometimes that his highest aspiration was to portray the rose of modesty which sometimes rises to the cheeks of young girls, but he admitted that no painter had ever succeeded.

He often asked his fiancée to bring Maria with them on their walks: Sally innocently did so, and Maria accepted with a silent and uneasy satisfaction. Her innocent accomplishment piqued Lawrence's curiosity. It appeared as though the art of coquetry, so foreign to Sally's character, was natural and inborn in Maria. Sally had given her love and wanted nothing but her lover's happiness: Maria offered, as if in jest, a thousand favours, and then refused them in sudden offence at attentions which she had herself invited. Lawrence, who was familiar with the game, thoroughly enjoyed it. Sally gradually allowed herself to be edged by these new actors in the play into the position of an

indulgent and somewhat guileless spectator. For a long time she did not notice that love, that diabolical and capricious stage-manager, had taken her part away from her. Very soon Lawrence and Maria were united in an unconscious conspiracy. Their tastes agreed on many matters and were opposed to Sally's. She liked simple dresses, classical lines which excited no remark: Lawrence and Maria were not afraid of eccentricity and liked surprising people. Both of them wanted a life of luxury, all the splendours of receptions and fashionable gatherings: Sally's heart was set upon a small house, the care of children and the visits of a few friends. She took little interest in money and wanted Lawrence to paint a small number of perfect portraits every year. Maria was inclined to encourage the young painter's taste for showy portraits, quickly finished and highly paid. Although Sally was by nature silent, and took great care never to touch on fundamental matters, yet she continually found herself differing from her fiancé. Maria, without precisely intending it, always brought the conversation back to subjects that were so perilous for her

sister's happiness and so congenial to her own attitude of mind.

Lawrence became nervous, irritable, and violent. He sometimes behaved to Sally with incredible harshness. He was sorry for it afterwards. "I must be mad," he said to himself: "she is faultless. But can I bear to lose the other?" Like all men of his type he was jealous of all women. His inability to choose between them was, in its essence, a limitless desire to possess them all. But he was more ready to give up Sally than Maria, because he felt that the former was more deeply under his control. Sally's love would be able to survive a betrayal: such a feeling of security was to a man like Lawrence a double temptation to betray her.

Nevertheless these feelings were as yet merely undefined inclinations, and he did not venture to admit them even to himself. He took a stern view of his own attitude. He would look relentlessly at himself in the glass with his penetrating painter's eye. "Yes," he said to himself, "the mouth and the chin show determination, but it is not based on reason: it is sensual, purely animal." Thus

divided against himself he tried to restrain his desires. But men have little aptitude for this, and the imprisoned passions managed to escape in innumerable disguises which hardly deceived these two loving hearts.

Sally was the most strong-minded of the three of them, and was the first to realize from the quality of certain silences that the situation was becoming intolerable and that her lover had fallen in love with her sister. She resigned herself sadly but without hesitation. "It is quite natural," she thought, "she is prettier . . . more lively, more attractive than I . . . my seriousness annoys him and I cannot shake it off. I would not if I could."

Nearly every evening Maria was tired and went to bed early, and Sally used to come and sit by her bed and talk to her. They loved these long conversations. At the end of one of them Sally asked her sister affectionately whether she was sure she was not in love with Mr. Lawrence. Maria blushed violently and for one moment she took her eyes off Sally's. No further explanation was necessary.

When Sally told him he was free, Lawrence acted in perfect sincerity a tremendous scene of despair. He protested, and then he confessed. She made him promise to go and see Mrs. Siddons and ask for Maria's hand.

VI

WHEN Maria was certain that she had won, she felt a sensation of triumph which she found delightful. She could not help dancing, singing, and smiling at herself in all the mirrors. The thought of Sally's possible grief hardly disturbed her happiness. "Poor Sally," she said to herself, "she never loved him. Will she know one day what love is? . . . She is so cold, so sensible." She thought too: "Besides, is it my fault? What did I do to attract Mr. Lawrence? I was simply myself, and no more. Was I to pretend to be stupid?" Sally, as she thought over her conduct and her state of mind, asked herself: "How was I able to endure losing what I love more than myself? Am I, as Maria seems to think, incapable of passion? Yet if, by sacrificing my life, I could get back Mr. Lawrence's love for one hour, for ten minutes even, I

would gladly choose to die. There is nothing that I am not ready to do for him: I feel that it was chiefly to secure his happiness that I withdrew, and Maria would not have done that. I believe I love him more than she does. It is like my mother; they call her cold, but I know the power and depth of her affection for us."

Sometimes she felt sorry that she had not more clearly revealed to Lawrence first her love, then her sorrow. "But no," she reflected once more: "it was not for me to weep and complain: my part is always to acquiesce and keep silence. When a thing is done, what is the use of tears?"

The new lovers did not know how to explain to Mrs. Siddons the incredible change that had taken place. Sally offered to do it herself and dealt with the matter with a great deal of pertinacious common-sense. Mrs. Siddons was astonished as well as displeased. She had long been aware of Lawrence's inconstancy: here was a terrifying proof of it. How could such a man make a husband? She had accepted him for Sally because she thought her capable of controlling him and,

if need be, of facing troubles and difficulties; but how would a capricious and wilful child get on in his company? Maria, too, was very delicate: her persistent cough made the doctors uneasy. "Happiness," said Sally to her mother, "will have the best possible effect on her health. All this last week since she has known that he loves her, she is already quite a different person, livelier and stronger too."

"Your father will never consent to this marriage," said Mrs. Siddons. "You forget how much importance he attaches to his daughters being assured of an adequate fortune for their support. I know Mr. Lawrence's debts to be considerable. Maria will be unequal to the task of managing the expenditure of a household; they will be most unhappy."

"Mr. Lawrence will work," said Sally. "Everyone says that he will soon be the only portrait painter of the time. Maria is very young: she will grow wiser."

She felt so strongly that she must not let herself be convinced by arguments that favoured her own feelings that she went so

far as to refute those which, at the bottom of her heart, she knew to be unassailable. The dispute went on for several weeks, and appeared to be having a bad effect on Maria's health. She coughed more persistently, became feverish every evening and grew thinner. Mrs. Siddons's resistance was finally overcome by her anxiety: she sanctioned visits, letters and walks, and, to prevent Mr. Siddons suspecting anything, Sally undertook to act as go-between for the engaged pair.

"Happy Maria," thought she: "she is enjoying the greatest happiness that a woman can hope for. If only Mr. Lawrence's affection does not fade away like his regard for me, now that there are no obstacles in his path. He grows so soon weary when he has got what he wants."

The improvement that had shown itself in Maria's health when Mrs. Siddons had given her consent was not maintained. The doctor had never greatly believed in this sentimental cure: her pulse made him uneasy, and the word "lungs" was mentioned. Sally begged that nothing should be said to Mr. Lawrence, who

would have been too deeply afflicted had he known the danger that threatened his beloved. When the doctor thought it necessary that Maria should keep to her room, Lawrence was allowed to see her every day. Sally kept her sister company and went out as soon as Mr. Lawrence's arrival was announced. She would then sit at the piano and try to play her favourite airs, but her fingers would not move and she fell into a reverie. "Alas," she said to herself, "how willingly would I accept Maria's illness, though it be dangerous, even mortal, if I might have her destiny as well." These feelings of despair gave her a strange pure joy.

A few days afterwards, just at the moment when she was about to leave the room as her habit was, Lawrence asked her to stay. After an instant's hesitation, as he insisted, she consented to do so. The day after he made the same request and a little later he asked her to sing for him as she used to do. She had an enchanting voice and composed airs for love poems. When she had finished singing Lawrence remained sitting beside the piano in an attitude of profound absorption. At last

Maria spoke to him; he shook his head, appeared to collect himself from a distance, and turning to Sally engaged her in earnest conversation about her new songs. This surprised Maria, who tried to attract his attention by showing some slight ill-humour, but he took no notice.

Then she began to change rapidly. She had grown thin, but her appearance now became bloated and her complexion assumed a yellowish tinge. She thought sometimes that her lover seemed to be looking at her with a kind of irritation. Lawrence himself hardly understood what was going on within him. He was looking for the vivid fresh beauty of the child that he had loved, and found nothing but a faded invalid. He grew tired of his daily visits, which became an intolerable interference with his everyday existence. Maria, who was indoors all day long, knew none of those little anecdotes of London life which alone could entertain the worldly young painter. She saw quite well that he was becoming less attentive, and that his compliments had grown infrequent: she was in despair, and her gloomy affection became more and more wearisome to

him. If Sally had not been present Lawrence could not have endured the strain, and perhaps he would have even ceased to come. But much against his will Sally's presence attracted him. The instant submission with which she had accepted his desertion, and above all the perfect self-possession with which she talked to him, astonished a man who was so used to the display of passionate affection: there was a mystery in this coldness that he could not understand. Did she still love him? He sometimes doubted it, and instantly wanted to win her back.

Six weeks after the day on which he had gained a reluctant consent from Mrs. Siddons, he asked for an interview with her, away from her daughters. "I now see my own mind clearly," he said to her. "The truth is it was Sally that I loved all the time. Maria is a child who does not understand me, and never will understand me. Sally was made to be my wife. She has inherited those perfect features, that balanced character, which I have admired in you since my childhood. You ask me how I could have made this mistake? You are an artist: you should understand. You know how

easily we artists can take our fancies for realities: more than other men we are the slaves of our humour. I dare not speak to Sally, but you must do it for me. And if I cannot have her, I will cease to live."

Mrs. Siddons was much astonished at Lawrence's fresh change of course, and accused him of playing with the feelings of two delicate girls; his caprices might cost them their health, even their lives. But as he persisted in his talk of suicide she hesitated. No doubt she found the situation less singular than an ordinary mother might have done. The stage had accustomed her to the most unlikely and complicated concatenations of events; this confused and shocking tragedy did not seem to her so different from those in which she had so often acted, and she accepted with professional tolerance the *dénouement* which the hero proposed. Besides, she had learnt from plays that a refusal always intensifies a lover's ardour. Lawrence was still her ideal of what a man should be: the respectful admiration, the soft flattery with which he surrounded her was the most delightful sensation that she had ever

experienced. She was ready to forgive the beautiful fallen angel what she would never have forgiven another. So, after much searching of heart, she consented once more to speak to her daughters.

Maria received the blow quite differently from Sally. She smiled weakly and said a few ironical words about Mr. Lawrence's vacillations. After that she did not speak of the matter again. The poor child was proud, and used her pride to hide her sorrow. She merely said that she wished she had never met him and asked if Sally proposed to receive him.

Sally hastened to reassure her. She could not help a feeling of exquisite happiness when she heard the amazing news. In a moment his inconstancy, his weakness, all was forgotten. She had loved too deeply not to find a thousand excuses for her lover's conduct. In spite of all her good sense she could not resist the overwhelming temptation to believe in the truth of what she longed for, and she felt convinced that Maria had never loved Lawrence. In this she must needs have been blinded by her passion, for the speedy change in the girl's

condition showed how deeply her emotions had been stirred. She became gloomy and pessimistic: once so frivolous and gay, she talked of nothing but the vanity of life and the uncertainty of human affairs.

"I think I shall not live much longer," she said. And when her mother and the doctor protested: "Yes," she went on, "perhaps I am wrong, perhaps it is merely nerves, but I cannot help thinking so. And what does it matter? I should be spared much suffering which I am not made to endure. I have not the gift of resignation, and my short life has been sufficiently unhappy for me to be weary of it unto death."

Lawrence begged urgently to be allowed to see Sally. She wrote to him: "You cannot be in earnest when you talk of coming back to the house: neither Maria nor I could bear it. Do you not think that though she does not love you it would distress her to see you offering to another the attentions which were hers for so long? Could you yourself bear to offer them? Could I endure to receive them?" But careful as she was to spare her sister's self-respect, she

felt a mad desire to see Mr. Lawrence again: with her mother's consent she arranged a secret interview. On the day she met him she bought a ring: she wore it all day, kissed it and gave it to Mr. Lawrence, begging him to keep it as long as he loved her.

They fell once more into the habit of meeting, in the early morning or at dusk, for long walks in the gardens. She would also go and see him in his studio and sing to him the airs that she had composed during their recent separation. "Do you believe," she said, when he congratulated her on the ever-increasing beauty of her voice: "do you believe that I should have sung and composed like this if I had not known you? You lived in my mind, in my heart, in every one of my ideas, and yet . . . you did not love me. But all that is forgotten."

At this time, in the closed room contaminated by her breath, Maria was wasting away. The spring began to break. Rays of sunlight moved slowly round the sick girl. As she stood at the window, she envied the little beggar-girls who ran about in the street. "The

light seems to be calling everything back to life again these days, except me," she said. "Oh, if I could only be out of doors even for but an hour, in the fresh breeze, I feel I should be myself again. Truly I want no more than this."

Such sad resignation in a creature who a few months before had been so delightfully eager for enjoyment frightened Mrs. Siddons. She would not allow herself to define the dreadful events she feared, but, uneasy and restless, unable to share her anxiety with Mr. Siddons, who knew nothing about the affair, nor with Sally, whose happiness she was unwilling to disturb, she could only find peace in a feverish study of her parts. A piece translated from the German, *The Stranger,* by Kotzebue, was being acted at the time. It was the story of a guilty woman who was pardoned by her husband. The boldness and novelty of the theme aroused a good deal of criticism. If such tolerance were commended, what was to become of the seventh commandment which safeguarded the domestic happiness of all Christian nations? But Mrs. Siddons played the woman with such delicacy and modesty that it

was impossible to disapprove. She herself liked the part because it offered many opportunities for weeping, and she found at the time great relief in the tears that she shed upon the stage.

VII

SUMMER arrived; Maria continued to cough and waste away. Misfortune had made her gentle and timid. She often asked Sally to sing to her, and as she listened to her sister's clear voice she felt sadder and yet more calm. She would not see anyone, especially men. "I want to be quiet and get well," she said. "I shall never want anything else."

When the weather grew warm, her doctors advised her being sent to the seaside. Mrs. Siddons was prevented by her work from going with her, but in the small town of Clifton she had a very old and much-attached friend, a Mrs. Pennington, who undertook the care of Maria. When Mrs. Pennington and Mrs. Siddons wrote to each other they began their letters "Dear Soul." This habit threw no light on Mrs. Siddons who had merely borrowed it from Mrs. Pennington, but it was

eminently characteristic of her friend. Mrs. Pennington was conscious of being a soul. She was capable of great devotion, but took considerable pleasure in the contemplation of her own goodness. The affectionate understanding with which she attended to the affairs of her friends touched no one more deeply than herself. She took particular pleasure in confessions—other people's confessions. She wrote very beautiful letters which she read over with admiration before she sent them off.

Mrs. Siddons, when placing Maria in her charge, told her in confidence the unhappy story of her daughter's love affair—just the kind of story to affect and delight Mrs. Pennington. To play a part in a domestic tragedy was the greatest delicacy that she could enjoy and offered her the most notable opportunity for a display of the resourcefulness of that noble soul.

Maria seemed glad to get away, but when a girl friend, who was saying good-bye to her, added, "You will make conquests at Clifton," she quickly assumed an expression of disgust: "I hate that word," she said: "it is an abomin-

able subject for a jest." She kissed her sister very affectionately and looked at her as though to read her countenance.

The excellent Mrs. Pennington did her best to entertain the invalid. She took her for long drives, she described the sun, the sky, and the fields in all her finest phrases. She read the fashionable novels aloud to her, and even copies of her best letters, and this was the greatest favour she could bestow. She nursed her with the most complete devotion. She was sincerely attached to this lovely melancholy girl whom she could see was growing worse every day. Yet she would have liked to receive some return for all her care: she considered that so much maternal and sympathetic solicitude was not undeserving of confidences, But Maria told her nothing. Her conversation was scattered with the most enticing bait, but all to no purpose: the girl sheered off at once into the stagnant and placid waters of banality. Sometimes she let fall a word or a phrase which disclosed the deepest bitterness. If Mrs. Pennington read to her from a London paper accounts of the continuance of her mother's

marvellous and tragic success in *The Stranger*, she said, with a sigh, "Is it not astonishing that people should want to weep in the theatre, as if there were not enough cause for weeping in reality?"

But as soon as the good lady had been lured to try and use such an inadvertence as a pretext to confess her patient, Maria drew back. She did not refuse to talk about Lawrence, whose character she described with contempt, but without making any reference to her personal relations with him. The cause of the secret distress, which she did not attempt to conceal, could not have been her health: she used constantly to say that she regarded death as a deliverance. She had some notion in her mind which she would not disclose, and to which it was impossible to penetrate.

At last Mrs. Pennington devised a test which she thought should bring Maria out of a reserve that made their relations less intimate and less pleasant for both of them than she could have wished. She chose for their reading a novel of Mrs. Sheridan in which the hero, a kind of Lovelace, pays simultaneous attentions to the two daughters of his benefactress

without being in love with either of them. It was an ingenious test. It often happens that a bruised soul, believing his sufferings to be in some way peculiar, hides them like a shameful sore. When he discovers that others share his passion and his misery he finds freedom and relief.

Maria heard the story with increasing emotion. Bent forward and leaning on her hand, with tears in her eyes, she listened to Penelope Pennington, who watched for the moment when confidences might be expected. When they reached the part which recalled in so surprising a manner one of the most painful scenes in her own life, she could no longer contain herself, and said, "Please stop, I cannot bear it: it is my own story."

The recollections that she had so long suppressed burst forth at last. She related Mr. Lawrence's double desertion, his double betrayal; she admitted the hatred with which she regarded him; and finally she allowed the amazed and delighted Mrs. Pennington to infer the cause of her anxiety. She was haunted by the fear of seeing her sister marry Lawrence. The prospect of such a union

filled her with horror, because she was certain that Sally would be unhappy with that false and wicked man.

The excellent Mrs. Pennington, who had been told by Mrs. Siddons what Maria did not know, that Sally and Lawrence were seeing each other as they had done before, tried to reason with her and convince Maria that she ought to leave her sister perfectly free. "If she marries him," she said, "I shall pass in despair the little time that is left to me." Seeing her in this wild condition, Penelope Pennington, most agreeably agitated by her feelings of compassion, wrote Mrs. Siddons one of her most finished letters to explain what was going on and to urge her to get Sally to promise not to enter into an engagement as long as Maria was ill. "I can see quite clearly how much unconscious spite and unacknowledged jealousy have influenced this unhappy child, but she has been most deeply wounded, and one must allow for her condition in order to judge her conduct rightly."

Besides, she felt that the fears expressed by Maria regarding Sally's happiness with so capricious a man were perfectly justified. She

only thought that this was a case in which the authority of a mother could be, and ought to be, profitably exerted.

"My dear friend," Mrs. Siddons answered, "you have developed the character of your poor invalid with a depth of penetration, a delicacy of perception and sweet indulgence that at once astonishes and charms me. Yes, kindest of friends and most admirable woman, you see her truly and can feel the difficulty it has been to temper disapprobation with tenderness in this dear creature's case. . . . Sally is well again, and I thank you very sincerely for the solicitude you have so kindly evinced for her future happiness. I have done all, my dear friend, that it is possible to do: for before your last and most excellent letter I had suggested to her my doubts, my fears. Her good sense and tenderness, it was evident, had needed no prompter, and, while she ingenuously confessed her predilection, she was as well aware of Mr. L.'s blameable conduct as anyone could be, and declared that (Maria totally out of the question) she felt the weight of many other objections that seemed to preclude the possibility of the dreaded event.

Parental authority, therefore, were I inclined to exert it, you see is needless."

At the time this letter arrived, the unfortunate Maria had just been seized with a violent attack of her malady, and the doctor had not concealed from Mrs. Pennington that she had not long to live. As Mrs. Siddons's work prevented her coming, Sally hastened to her sister's side. Before leaving London, she asked her mother to tell Mr. Lawrence that he must give up all hope of marrying her. She supported this decision with such sensible reasons that Mrs. Siddons could not help saying to her: "My sweet angel, my excellent child, how can I praise you as you deserve?"

When Mrs. Siddons had delivered Sally's message, Lawrence went off in a state of frenzy, saying that they would soon see what his feelings would force him to do. Mrs. Siddons thought his meaning was that now that he was aware of Maria's desperate state, which might have been due, in part at least, to his own cruel caprices, he felt a remorse so frightful that he contemplated suicide. "Unhappy man!" she thought. "Indeed if he

thinks that her death is due to his fault, his sufferings must be intolerable."

At that very time Lawrence had just exhibited a picture at the Royal Academy, representing that very scene from *Paradise Lost* which had always been so dear to Mrs. Siddons, "Satan summoning his legions on the shore of a flaming ocean." The best critics described this picture in the following terms: "A confectioner dancing in the middle of a mass of flaming treacle." The best critics took Lawrence rather less seriously than Mrs. Siddons. The fact was that in this picture Lucifer had a distinct resemblance to the Kembles, to John, to his sister, to Sally and to Maria. The painter was obviously obsessed by the type.

He set out for Clifton, and from a hotel in the town addressed a long epistle to Mrs. Pennington in which every expression of his feelings bristled with capitals. He begged her to convey a message to his perfect, his adorable Sally: he asked her to take care that she did not enter into any undertakings with her dying sister. "If you are a woman of kindly and tender feelings," he wrote, "(and you

must be, for these are qualities which always accompany talents such as yours) you will not merely pardon me but you will do me the service that I ask."

Penelope Pennington showed not a little partiality to people who talked about her talents; she consented to meet Lawrence.

VIII

THERE is always great pleasure in a feeling of heroism, and vicarious heroism provides the purest form of it. Mrs. Pennington arrived at the rendezvous ready to make every sacrifice on Sally's behalf, and strangely excited by the approaching combat, the prize of which was to be another's happiness.

Mr. Lawrence opened the conversation in the melodramatic manner: with frenzied gesticulations, and the most violent outbursts, he threatened to commit suicide on her doorstep if he were not allowed to see Sally. "Sir," said Mrs. Pennington coldly, "I have seen your performance before, and better played: if you are desirous of my friendship and if you wish me to help you as far as I am able without doing any injury to my friends, you must behave reasonably and control yourself."

"Control myself," said he, clasping his hands

together and raising his eyes to heaven; "can this really be a woman that is speaking to me? Only a man, and a man of common mould, could behave sensibly when all that he loves is in peril. Yes, Madam, I am indeed mad: but my madness is very natural. I am terrified of losing both of them, for, after Sally I love Maria more than anything in the world."

"Sir," said Mrs. Pennington, "no doubt I am behaving in an extremely masculine and common manner in trying to use my reason to deal with such a matter, but I must confess to you that I am accustomed to think for myself, and that I attach just as much importance to all this farrago of love and suicide as an experience of thirty years allows me to do. I understand perfectly well the condition in which you would like to find these women: innocent, weak, and trembling before you. But Sally is not of this type, although she is indeed feminine and affectionate. I have often talked to her about these matters and I have not been able to restrain, unfeminine as I am, tears of admiration and love for her extraordinary good sense, her incomparable sweetness. You

have taken the wrong course, sir, and Sally is not a girl to be won by threats and violence."

"Can you not see, Madam, how cruel you are? You say to me, 'Be calm, for no one can compare with her whom you are to lose: control yourself, for her charms are infinite: why do you distress yourself, since nothing can shake her resolution? You have taken the wrong course: she will not yield.' Really, Madam, I have never considered the best devices for discovering the extent of her affection. She left me and I have followed her, and I will not leave the place until I have seen her."

"There is so much method in your madness, my dear sir, that I am convinced that you can very well master it if you wish."

Mr. Lawrence was behaving like certain children who look out of the corner of their eyes to see if their screams are producing any effect. A look showed him that he was on the wrong tack.

"Dear Lady," he said, "I see you have a good heart. I am a painter and I am used to reading people's faces. Under the mask of harshness that you are pleased to wear to-day I can catch a glimpse of kind and compassion-

ate eyes. You can see that I love Sally deeply: you will help me—you will help us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pennington, who was touched, "you are a great magician, Mr. Lawrence, and I frankly admit that you have guessed my character aright. I have received many bitter lessons in the course of my life which have taught me to master a naturally warm disposition, but the effect of these lessons could only reach my mind: my heart retains all its youthful feelings."

Upon this they made friends. She persuaded him to leave Clifton without having seen Sally; but she promised to keep him informed of anything that happened.

"What does Maria think of me?" he went on to ask.

"Maria? She says sometimes, 'I wish no harm to Mr. Lawrence and I forgive him.' "

"Does Sally still love me? That is what I want to know. When for a moment she forgets her grief, how does she think of me?"

"She says that her heart is so full of her tragic obligations that what is now at hand forbids her to think of the future. We often speak of you, sometimes in terms of praise

that would give you pleasure, sometimes with regret that so many gifts should be spoiled by the strangeness of your character. I cannot tell you more."

However, after a silence she added: "The present is a barrier between Sally and yourself, and even the future is full of obstacles, but possibly they are not insurmountable. Master your passion, Mr. Lawrence, try to acquire a spirit of resignation and dignity; then you will one day perhaps be in a condition to deserve the exquisite creature whom you love."

The slight hope that she gave him was tragic in its very essence. The only event which could bring these two lovers together in the future was the death of Maria. It was thus that Lawrence had understood her. "Alas," he thought, "this is terrible: but it is also inevitable. Sally will suffer, and so shall I. But I shall soon forget and all will come right." Under the appearance of despair, the calculations of his passion were cool enough.

He left Clifton without any scandal. Mrs. Pennington felt she had won a great victory and always spoke of young Lawrence with a compassionate and protective air.

Unhappily it became only too certain that the terrible event to which she had referred could not be averted. Maria's cough grew worse: in the waxen whiteness of her face the expression began to change. Sally and Mrs. Pennington made every effort to hide from her the truth about her state. They maintained an atmosphere of gaiety and confidence round the dying girl. Sally sang to her airs from Haydn and old English tunes: Mrs. Pennington read to her: both of them were surprised to find in themselves a sensation of happiness, faint indeed and transitory, but extraordinarily pure. Maria herself had achieved a complete serenity of mind. She seemed to be entirely reassured as to the subject of her apprehension. When she spoke of Mr. Lawrence to her sister, she called him "our common enemy." She never grew tired of music.

The days became shorter: the autumn wind whistled dismally down the chimneys as the first fires were kindled on the hearths: great strips of ragged cloud moved past the windows of the sick-room. She felt worse. Sally and Mrs. Pennington were horrified to see the last

traces of her beauty disappear as though smoothed away by invisible fingers. She often asked for her mirror. One day, after looking at herself for a long while, she said: "I wish my mother were here: it was the greatest pleasure of my life to look at her, and it will not be mine much longer." They told Mrs. Siddons, who stopped her performances and came to Clifton at once. When she arrived Maria could no longer eat nor sleep. Her mother stayed two days and nights beside her without a rest. The sight of that beautiful face whose noble serenity remained unmoved even in the acutest grief seemed to soften Maria's sufferings. On the third evening, towards midnight, Mrs. Siddons, who was worn out with fatigue, went and lay down on a bed. About four o'clock in the morning Maria became greatly excited and asked Mrs. Pennington, who had stayed with her, to have the doctor fetched.

He came and stayed nearly an hour. Maria said to Mrs. Pennington that she quite understood the truth now and begged her to conceal nothing from her. Mrs. Pennington admitted that the doctor could indeed give no further

hope. Maria thanked her for her frankness with much warmth and sweetness. "I feel much better," she said firmly, "and above all much quieter in mind." She spoke of her hopes and her fears: "her fears," she said, "that were based on nothing but the recollection of an overweening vanity that had made her take too great an interest in her good looks." But she added that she relied on the mercy of her Creator, and she was sure that the great change that had taken place in her body—as she said this she looked at her poor emaciated hands—would be accepted as a sufficient expiation. Then she asked to see her sister. When she had been awakened, Maria told her how dear she was to her and how much she loved her beauty. As she lay there dying she had but one thing on her mind, and that was Sally's happiness. "Promise me, Sally, never to become Mr. Lawrence's wife: I cannot endure the thought."

"Dear Maria," said Sally, "do not think of anything that might distress you."

"No, no," persisted Maria, "it does not distress me in the least. But we must speak of this once and for all."

Sally resisted for a long time and at last she said despairingly, "Oh, it is impossible."

She meant that it was impossible for her to give such a promise, but Maria understood that she felt that the marriage was indeed impossible. "I am happy," she said: "I am quite satisfied."

At this moment Mrs. Siddons came in: Maria told her that she had resigned herself to death and spoke to her with the utmost propriety about the great change that was so soon to come upon her. She asked if they knew exactly how long she had still to live. She repeated several times, "When will it be? When will it be?" Then she recovered herself and said, "Perhaps better not."

She expressed a wish to hear the prayers for the dying. Mrs. Siddons took the book and read the prayers slowly and devoutly, and with such a perfect clarity of articulation that in spite of her emotion Mrs. Pennington could not help admiring the superhuman stateliness of her delivery.

Maria followed with the greatest attention: when it was over she said, "Mother, that man told you that he destroyed all my letters: I

do not believe his protestations; please get them back from him." She added, "Sally has just promised me that she will never marry him; haven't you, Sally?"

Sally, who was crying, knelt down beside her bed and said, "I did not promise, my dear angel—but I will promise. I promise because you insist." Maria then said gravely, "Thank you, Sally. Dearest mother, and Mrs. Pennington, you must be witnesses. Sally, give me your hand. You swear that you will never be his wife. Mother, Mrs. Pennington, lay your hands on hers. You understand? You are witnesses to this. Sally, sacred—sacred must be this promise."

She stopped for an instant to take breath, and then continued:

"Remember me, and may God bless you!"

After this her features recovered a calmness and beauty which they had not displayed since the beginning of her illness. For the first time for many long hours she sank back upon her pillow. "My love," said her mother: "there is something heavenly in your expression now."

Maria smiled and looked at Sally and Mrs.

Pennington, and when she saw that the same thought was in their minds, she seemed very happy. She asked that the servants should be brought in, thanked them for their care and their kindness, and begged them to forget her impatience and her selfishness. An hour later she was dead: her pale lips were opened in a faint calm smile.

IX

ON the day following Maria's death, the wind fell. A bright sun shed over everything an air of luminous gaiety. It seemed to Sally as though the pure and delicate soul of her sister had brought peace to this lovely autumn sky. She could not rid her mind of her impression of that deathbed. The promise that had been extorted from her appeared easy to keep. Her body was exhausted: a violent attack of asthma supervened and her mother nursed her with the utmost devotion.

Mrs. Siddons's grief was grave, simple, and silent. Neither her lack of sleep nor her tears had affected the serenity of her expression. With unshakable firmness she gave her care and attention to the details of daily life. Those who did not know her well were astonished at the self-possession, in such painful circum-

stances, of one who knew so well how to weep at imaginary misfortunes on the stage.

Her greatest anxiety was to know how Lawrence would receive the news that put an end to his hopes for ever. She asked Mrs. Pennington to write and tell him about Maria's last moments, the promise that had been demanded and given; and to request him to forget. She thought that this tragic narrative could not but compel him to behave with generosity.

Mrs. Pennington undertook the melancholy task with a gloomy alacrity. The conquest and the submission of the beautiful rebellious angel was one of the most glorious episodes in her life: she used all her skill, which was not inconsiderable, in the composition of a decisive letter. Two days later she received the following, written in a large scrawl:

"It is only my Hand that shakes, not my Mind. I have play'd deeply for her, and you think that she will still escape me. I'll tell you a Secret: it is possible she may. Mark the End.

"You have all play'd your parts admirably ! ! !

"If the scene you have accurately described is mention'd by you to any Human Being, I will pursue your name with execration."

Mrs. Pennington re-read these lines several times before she understood them. What did he mean? That the three women had invented these stories about a promise in order to get rid of him? Could he really believe in such machinations? "You have all played your parts admirably." The text did not allow of any other meaning. Mrs. Pennington was seized with the most violent agitation. A man who at such a moment could not find a word of pity for the unhappy woman he had so deeply wounded, and whose death was perhaps due to his inconstancy, must be something like a monster. "I will pursue your name with execration." What did he mean by such a threat? Did he propose to come and attack her in her own home? Would he pursue her with slanders and insinuations? What hurt her more than anything was the fact that this outburst of devilish rage was the return for so beautiful a letter that she could not restrain her tears as she wrote it. In the course of that evening she conceived a violent hatred for Lawrence that

exercised a considerable influence on his life.

She began by sending his deplorable communication to Mrs. Siddons, begging her to take proper precautions. Mr. Siddons, John Kemble, all the male members of the family must be informed, for only men would be strong enough to defeat the attempts of a madman. Sally must not go out alone: no one could tell the extremes of conduct of which so dark and uncontrollable a nature might be capable.

When Mrs. Siddons received this letter she could not help smiling. She viewed the situation with much more self-possession and tolerance. Sally herself could not feel any very serious disapproval for the transports inspired by the love that she aroused.

"Of course," she said to herself, "he was wrong to write such a violent letter, and above all in not expressing any grief for poor Maria's death, but he wrote in a moment of madness. I can imagine what he must have thought when he heard of that dreadful promise, when I remember what I felt when I made it. There is no other time in my life when I could have given it." She wrote to Mrs. Pennington, who

replied with a certain warmth. "Mad? Not the least in the world. As long as one can hold a pen and form letters one knows very well what one is doing."

Sally talked over the situation at great length with her mother: they both agreed in considering the majority of the precautions suggested by Mrs. Pennington as being useless. There was no point in telling the cold-blooded Mr. Siddons or the theatrical Uncle Kemble. Their interference could only increase the difficulties. Mrs. Siddons seemed also anxious to assure Lawrence that she was heartily sorry for him. "Perhaps it would be as well," she said, "to let him know that you will never marry anyone else." But Sally refused.

Unfortunately she could not remain in any doubt of the real state of her feelings. In spite of all his faults, all his harshness and all his recklessness, she loved Mr. Lawrence tenderly, and if she had not been bound by a solemn pledge, she would have come back to him. "But do not distress yourself," she said to her mother, "I look upon my promise as sacred and I will keep it: if I cannot be mistress of

my feelings—one's feelings may be beyond control though one can answer for one's conduct—I will be faithful to my promise."

As she uttered these words she knew that in doing so she was binding herself even more closely and she regretted it.

"What am I saying?" she thought. "And why? Why am I preparing my own martyrdom?" She seemed to herself sometimes to be made up of two personalities, one of them willing and speaking, and the other desiring and protesting: that her nobler self forced her inferior self to accept these hard and bitter decisions. But was it her nobler self?

Lawrence wrote her an entirely sensible letter. He had realised that violence was useless. She answered him resolutely but not unkindly. "His only fault," she said, "is loving me too much. This, for once, would be a suitable occasion for a little more inconstancy." Her heart was filled with the profoundest joy when she reflected: "Yet I have held this wayward heart." But she had only to recall Maria's happy and sweet expression to be in no doubt of where her duty lay.

One day, as she was going to her window,

she saw Lawrence on the pavement opposite looking up at her room. She draw back quickly until she was no longer visible. At that instant Mrs. Siddons, who was tidying some drawers in the next room, called Sally to show her a dress that had belonged to Maria. It was one of those delicate white dresses in the Greek style that had come into fashion from France. They both of them thought of the lovely figure that had filled out the delicate material, and stood clasped in each other's arms. Mrs. Siddons murmured softly two lines from her part of Constance:

> "Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Stuffs out its vacant garments with its form."

When Sally came back into her room and, at a distance from the window, threw a quick and furtive glance into the street, Mr. Lawrence had disappeared.

X

FOR some months Lawrence tried to renew relations with Sally either by writing to her or sending her messages through mutual friends. She always refused to see him. "No," she said; "I feel myself incapable of treating him with coldness, and I will not treat him in any other way." But she thought about him continually and found much pleasure in imagining long conversations with him in which he told her of his love, his despair, and his eternal fidelity. She could spend whole days in such dreams, watching the moving leaves and the light clouds floating by; and then she felt completely happy.

Lawrence's attacks became less frequent. Once more the stream of time flowed on in a smooth and placid course. The angelic shadowy image of Maria still hovered between her thoughts and the objects before her. Mrs. Siddons acted in fresh parts. Her Isabel, in

Measure for Measure, was considered a chaste and moving performance: she wore a black-and-white dress that was copied by all the women in London. Sally went to the theatre a great deal and visited a few friends' houses. She could not understand how life could go on so naturally after such dreadful happenings. But it still distressed her to hear the names of Lawrence and Maria, and she trembled when she saw in the street a male outline that made her apprehend a meeting that she longed for and yet dreaded.

Towards the spring, Lawrence completely gave up persecuting her with his addresses. She fell into a deep melancholy.

"Are you happy?" said her mother to her.

"I am always happy with you," she answered.

But an immense regret took possession of her.

Her courage, which had never failed her in times of danger, weakened suddenly now the storm was past. She could not rid her imagination of the scene when her promise had been given. She always saw herself kneeling by the side of the bed, her hand clasped in her

sister's that had become so thin and so white. "Poor Maria," she thought. "She ought not to have asked it of me. Did she do it out of anxiety for my happiness? Was there not also a little jealousy of me and resentment against him?" This continual recurrence of the same questions and the same regrets began to wear out a naturally delicate system. She had frequent attacks of coughing and shortness of breath that alarmed her mother.

The story of her love affair was now known to a certain number of their intimate friends. Lawrence's indiscreet lamentations had revealed the secret. Many of them, when they saw her so obviously miserable, advised her not to attach an undue importance to a promise that had been extracted in this way. Her determination was sometimes shaken by this advice. She told herself that she was certainly sacrificing her life, her one short life, to a word. How could her sister, who was now freed from the bonds of the flesh, be jealous? An undertaking presupposes the presence and the insistence of the person to whom it has been given. But if Maria's lovely shade was wandering unseen in their midst, how could she

desire anything but the happiness of those that she had loved?

Although this reasoning seemed by no means easy to refute, she still had the powerful but inexplicable feeling that her duty was to keep her promise against all reason. Nevertheless, one day she made up her mind to write to Mrs. Pennington, who had been a witness and surety of her oath, to ask her advice. "What value did she attach to it all?" How Sally hoped that her reply would encourage her in what she wanted!

But Mrs. Pennington was pitiless. The duties of other people, not being dissembled from us like our own by the violence of our passions, nearly always appear astonishingly plain.

"Never let us deceive ourselves," she wrote, "in matters of positive right and wrong. Certainly Sally's promise, to her dying sister, being voluntary, is as binding as any human engagement can be. No promise can be 'extorted,' except with a pistol at the breast; but Sally was free to have remained silent or to have refused her sister, whose fate was fixed: nothing could have been a matter of disquiet

to her for many hours at that time; and if Sally chose to give her the satisfaction she required, it was voluntarily done on her part, and in all truth and justice she must abide the consequence, and will ever have reason to bless the impulse which I am confident was a divine interposition to save her from certain ruin. It had been no object with Maria to enforce this promise till her nature became changed, and absolutely purified from all earthly foibles and passions. Why, then, should that be imputed to her weakness and infirmity, to low resentment, and grovelling affections, from which her nature seemed, in all other respects, to be discharged? It was, to me, rather a proof of the illumination she appear'd, thro' all her latter hours, to act under, and of her being sublimated above them."

After this Sally seemed to resign herself. And yet, if at that moment Lawrence had come back, if chance had thrown them together and if he had been able and ready to say a few affectionate words to her, she could not have helped following him. But Lawrence did not come back. The gossip of the town reported that he was going to be married, and then that

he had fallen in love with the reigning beauty, Miss Jennings.

Sally was very anxious to see this lady, and had her pointed out to her one evening at the theatre. Her features were fine and regular, and she looked rather stupid. Mr. Lawrence came and sat down beside her: he seemed happy and in high spirits. As she looked at them Sally was seized by a kind of electric shock and she felt that she was blushing. As she was leaving the theatre she met her late fiancé in the corridor. He made her a slight bow, correct and cold. She realised that he had ceased to love her. Until then she had hoped that he would always keep, even though he could hope no longer, a distant admiration for her, respectful and passionate. But his look left her no room for doubt.

Thenceforward she became quite a different person, rather gay in her demeanour and entirely taken up with trivial pleasures, but she grew steadily weaker. She had given up singing. "I used only to sing for two people: one of them is gone, and the second has forgotten me."

Autumn came once more. The wind whis-

tling in the chimneys recalled the terrible hours when Maria lay dying and lamenting her fate with such gentle resignation.

Then came, one after another, a glorious succession of sunny days.

Mrs. Siddons, unknown to Sally, had resumed her normal relations with Lawrence. Being in need of a red carmine which she had been in the habit of getting from him, she had commissioned someone to ask for it, and he had come in person. They soon recovered the note of their conversations in the past. The painter had invited the actress to come and see his pictures, and she had talked to him about her latest parts. He had admired the youthful complexion which neither years nor sorrows had been able to spoil. He could not see one wrinkle in those perfect features.

For a long time it was believed that the French were going to invade England. During the intervals at the theatre, the thoughts of the spectators turned to the carpenters of Boulogne who were then driving nails into their rafts. Mrs. Siddons continued to draw large audiences; but the connoisseurs thought that her acting was becoming a little me-

chanical. She had reached that point of perilous mastery of her art where the great artist unconsciously imitates his own style. There was something dexterous and ingenious in her scenes of passion that shocked her admirers. Sometimes her facile perfection became wearisome and even tedious.

Sally was nearly twenty-seven years old, an age when a woman must clearly envisage what the life of an old maid may be like. She thought about it without bitterness.

"In the first place," she said to herself, "I am always ill and no doubt I shall not live. But who knows? Perhaps when I am fifty I shall regret the emptiness of my life and commit some dreadful folly." This absurd notion made her patient. The truth was that she remained faithful to the only emotion that had ever stirred her soul. She belonged to the type that create for themselves so beautiful an image of love that they cannot imagine its end nor its renewal. She carefully avoided any display of depression, so much so that in the drawing-rooms where she was a welcome guest she passed for a lively and pleasant companion. It was also noticed that she showed much

toleration for the weaknesses of others, and especially for the weaknesses of love. She was on terms of affectionate friendship with several young people and, except for occasional violent and painful attacks of asthma, she did not seem unhappy.

In 1802 peace with France was signed, travel routes were reopened and normal life began once more. Mr. Siddons was very anxious that his wife should accept an engagement to tour for a year in Ireland. He kept the household budget. The London managers did not pay highly, and they were in considerable need of money. Although Mrs. Siddons was distressed at leaving her family for so long a period, she understood that the sacrifice was necessary. For many long months Dublin, Cork, Belfast applauded her as Lady Macbeth, Constance and Isabella. Effects which had grown familiar to the habitués of Drury Lane seemed spontaneous and moving to this unaccustomed public. The enthusiasm was immense, and the takings were magnificent. Letters from Sally reached her regularly, sensible and cheerful letters. She wrote about the theatres, society and her clothes. This super-

ficial light-heartedness did not conceal a profound spiritual and physical weakness. She watched herself for certain symptoms that had appeared in her sister before the final months of her life. She often thought of death without terror and without regret. For a long while her life had been no more than a dream devoid of hope. She let herself slip gently towards the peaceful world of shadows.

Her father, who saw that she was sinking, hesitated for a long time before letting his wife know, but in March of 1803 the doctors thought the danger so imminent that he made up his mind to write to a friend and fellow-actress of Mrs. Siddons, but urged her at the same time not to say anything for the moment. This lady, who could not conceal her anxiety, showed the letter to Mrs. Siddons, who at once decided to break all her engagements and go and nurse her daughter. When she wanted to go on board the boat she was told that there was a terrific storm in the Irish Sea, and that no vessel could make the crossing for a few days. Gusts of wind swept the rain in sombre sheets across the city. Mrs. Siddons offered

to pay double, treble the usual fare, but in vain: there was not one captain who thought it possible to risk his vessel in such a hurricane. Since she was compelled to wait she went on with her performances. The time she spent on the stage was the only period in the day when she escaped from her dark reflections.

"What is happening now?" she thought. "Sally seemed fairly strong when I came away: no doubt she will hold out . . . but, a human life is something so very fragile."

She spent long hours in prayer, beseeching God at least not to take away her most beloved daughter. All the scenes of Maria's death passed before her mind: she pictured Sally alone, calling for her mother. The long dark clouds moving rapidly along the horizon recalled the last days at Clifton. In the evening the noise of the applause at the close of each act meant the end of a soothing dream, the return to the agonizing reality. After a week of waiting she was at last able to cross, and started in a post-chaise for London. At the first stop she received a message from Mr. Siddons that her daughter no longer lived.

She remained for a time in that state of prostration which, with her, was the accompaniment of terrible grief, incapable of even replying to the consolations of her friends. It distressed her to feel that they perhaps thought her callous when she was thinking of nothing but her dead daughter. But her unshakeable pride stopped at her very lips anything but the most trivial and commonplace phrases.

Soon, to everyone's surprise, she announced that she was going to start acting again, and requested that a performance of *King John* should be advertised. When the day came she went to the theatre and dressed without a single word.

Those who that evening saw Constance weeping for her son carried away with them an ineffaceable impression of beauty. Not merely did they recognize all the old talent of Mrs. Siddons, but they said that never before had she reached these heights. Such was the gloomy majesty of the great actress's movements that a whole funeral procession seemed to come upon the stage in her company. When she came to the lamentations of the old Queen, she had the feeling that for the first

time since Sally's death she could give utterance to her love, her horror, and her despair:

> "I am not mad! I would to heaven I were!
> For then 'tis like I should forget myself:
> O, if I could, what grief should I forget!
> Preach some philosophy to make me mad."

At last her grief took form: it was exercised by poetry, released by rhythm, made manifest by beauty. Her tears, too long restrained, burst forth: their warm streams poured down her cheeks and made a trembling and luminous veil between her and the countless heads in front of her. The world was like a mournful symphony over which her voice, like the violin, breathed lamentation and redemption; and as sometimes the oboe or the flute will discourse some long lonely theme which the orchestra seeks in vain to overwhelm with its waves of sonorous and tragic harmony, so in the depth of her actress's soul a far-off melody, frail and almost gay, murmured again and yet again, "I have never acted so well."

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